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Aeropittura, Futurism and Space in the 1930s: Continuity, Innovation and Reception

Elisa Sai

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements of
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts.
Historical Studies Department, August 2010.

Word Count: 81120

Abstract

Artistically speaking, Futurist production dating from the foundation of the movement in 1909 until the First World War has traditionally benefited from a considerable scrutiny, often to the detriment of the rest of the Futurist trajectory that continued until the outbreak of the Second World War. Conventionally stigmatized as an unsophisticated form of political propaganda, *Aeropittura*, which developed throughout the 1930s, is probably one of the most controversial Futurist productions. An analysis of the critical responses to *Aeropittura* from the post-war period until the present day will constitute the initial section of this text together with an investigation into the critical reception of Futurism among its contemporaries in the 1930s and after 1945. The aim is to identify key episodes that have shaped the conventional interpretation or provided innovative new perspectives. In the second chapter the developments of the notion of space within the Futurist aesthetic will be explored in conjunction with a brief exploration of contemporary groundbreaking scientific discoveries and their popularization, innovations in the cultural and artistic discourse and pioneering philosophical theories on time and space. Issues of control and power in reference to the visual sphere and a pantheistic, multi-sensorial approach to nature are some of the themes that will be explored in the text. A more environmental notion of space will be discussed in the third chapter that concentrates on the architectural theories formulated by the Futurist artists. Through *plastica murale* and *polimaterismo* the artists attempted to find an alternative form of artistic expression that could articulate their desire for an expansion of artistic practices and spaces. The last chapter addresses the extent to which particular themes of space inherent in late Futurism impacted on later artworks and how artists developed the spatial Futurist postulates into other forms of artistic practices.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Dr Mike O’Mahony for his detailed and constructive comments and for his important support throughout this work.

Author’s declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

.....Eliza L..... 15/12/2010

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Introduction

A rapid overview of the many events organised as a consequence of the celebration of the 2009 centenary of the Futurist manifesto will surely lead to the conclusion that Marinetti's movement is experiencing unprecedented popularity. Conferences, workshops, seminars, performances of Futurist music, theatre and poetry, dinners featuring Futurist menus and, of course, national and local exhibitions of Futurist art and paintings have all attracted both the general public and the scholarly intelligentsia. The communicative, extrovert and extravagant nature of Futurism has been exposed and re-enacted through different media, agents and channels. However, despite the flourishing interest, the enduring indifference and distrust surrounding Futurism is an injustice to which the only Italian avant-garde movement has been subject for a long time – to the enduring chagrin of scholars and enthusiasts. Although this deeply-entrenched scepticism is difficult to detect in the general positive contemporary receptions of Futurist art, it has to be acknowledged that a problematic political association and an occasionally questionable ideology have regularly shaped conventions in interpretation. If a resurgence of studies on the movement has increased the general interest in Futurism, intensified the debate, and concurrently, improved the broad assessment, this has not occurred homogeneously over the entire chronological spectrum of the Futurist production. Artistically speaking, Futurist production dating from the foundation of the movement in 1909 until the First World War has traditionally benefited from a regular and considerable scrutiny, often to the detriment of the rest of the Futurist trajectory that continued until the outbreak of the Second World War. While the considerable attention paid to the first artistic interpreters of Futurism is expected and not at all contested, by definition it neither implies nor justifies the apathetic and often negative criticism towards the late development of the

movement. Moreover, within the broad production in post-war Futurism, some particular areas have suffered more than others from the lack of critical responses. It is safe to say that *Aeropittura*, which developed throughout the 1930s and whose official beginning was sanctioned by the publication of the manifesto in 1929, is probably one of the most controversial artistic Futurist productions. Even today, following an innumerable publications and studies on Futurism, *Aeropittura* occupies an insignificant space in the historiography and criticism of the movement. The problematic historical period dominated by the tragic evolution of the Fascist regime has impacted the interpretation of a whole range of artistic productions including but not limited to Futurism. Conventionally, *Aeropittura* and other productions of post-war Futurism have been stigmatised as an unsophisticated form of political propaganda and the artists' alleged collusions with the regime have constituted an enduring burden. While for the early part of the Futurist movement the relationship with politics is somehow resolved, the diffidence and lack of interest in engaging in a substantial analysis of the artistic production of *Aeropittura* seems to continue in the present days. Moreover, while for contemporary artistic phenomena such as *Novecento*, an informed and extensive process of evaluation has been conducted, *Aeropittura* is still located in the limbo of interpretation, acclaimed by some and totally ignored by others. Therefore, an overview of the reception of *Aeropittura*, provided by this thesis in the first chapter, is not only desirable but to some extent necessary to recognise the way in which the conventions in interpretation have been formed and perpetuated over time. By identifying the main interpretative tendencies it is then possible to concentrate on aspects, which despite having been neglected, may turn out to be crucial for an improvement of an understanding of that artistic phase. Beside the controversial political affiliation, the problems in the interpretation of *Aeropittura* also concern the ambiguous position, not only in relation to the political and historical context, but also within the movement itself. The convention in academic study to

concentrate on the eight or nine years following the publication of the founding manifesto resulted in not simply excluding a significant production of Futurism from the analysis but more importantly, it contributed to a perception of the movement based on an internal fragmentation. By separating the 'first' Futurism from the 'second', two different categories were created. These were not neutral categories but expressed a value judgment in which a 'first' innovative, original and valid Futurism was followed by a repetitive and inferior imitation. Recent criticism has reassessed the dynamic of a separation between the different chronological periods proposing an overall vision of continuity and unity throughout the entire Futurist trajectory. As a consequence, providing an analysis specifically focused on the artistic production of Aeropittura and at the same time avoiding fragmenting, in an anachronistic manner, the entire Futurist experience can constitute a challenge. If the continuous relationship of Aeropittura and post-war Futurism with the early Futurist artistic achievements of the twentieth century cannot be undermined, it is also important to focus on the specific changes or developments in the aesthetic introduced in the later period. In a movement in which innovation and the 'language of rupture' constitute compelling forces, Aeropittura's more harmonious relationship with the past (early Futurism and Italian artistic tradition) and its present (Fascist establishment) has constituted an uncomfortable pairing implying both a deterioration of its avantgardist power and reprehensible political convictions.

Within the already complex relationship between 'first' and 'second' Futurism, Aeropittura sits in an uncomfortable position. Chronologically, it belongs to post-war Futurism but within this macro category the term Aeropittura itself describes the distinctive characteristics of its artistic production. The word Aeropittura expresses the artistic means involved, *pittura* (painting) and the subject or possibly the setting, *aria* (air): self-evidently, painting of air. This may, at first glance, seem obvious, but things are far more complicated. From 1929 the

notion of Aeropittura was extensively theorized in Futurist writings while at the same the artists began to call themselves *Aeropittori* (Aeropainters) rather than simply Futurists. In other cases, they used 'Futurist' a prefix to herald the definition of aeropainters: *aeropittori Futuristi*. For the artists the term Aeropittura did not simply designate a style or a technique, instead Aeropittura was a new chapter in the Futurist artistic production. In a sense the artists' position has proved to be a challenge in recent criticism, often reluctant to adopt this terminology. By definition, the term Aeropittura indisputably indicates painting as exclusive artistic production, nevertheless the same artists were involved in creating artwork that, although impossible to interpret as painting, were very much informed by the principles of Aeropittura. In particular, as this thesis will discuss, the notion and representation of space in painting finds strong correspondences in their theory on architecture, interior design and mural works. Moreover, the prefix 'aero' is also applied to other forms of art such as music, poetry and architecture. In this respect, despite being a construction of recent criticism and hardly ever deployed by the Futurist artists, the definition *Aerofuturism* appears to be more appropriate and adequately comprehensive to cover different creative works by artists affiliated to the same movement working in the same historical period.

The prefix 'aero', beside the literal reference to air, needs to be contextualised in its reference to the aeroplane, the technological means through which flying and the discovery of an aerial dimension became accessible. Therefore Aeropittura refers to a painting of air, an aeroplane or a painting located in an aerial space. Although a reference to flight can be traced even in the publication following the foundation of Futurism; with Aeropittura the technological epitome becomes the aeroplane that, in a metaphorical contest, overtakes the car as a symbol of modernity and mechanical power.

If art criticism is often substantiated by its capacity to unravel complex material and provide meaningful categories, the scholars working on Aeropittura and post-war Futurist art face the

interpretative challenge of organising the multivarious visual nature of Futurism artistic production, which include the stylistic differences within Aeropittura itself. The wide range of artists, the broad chronological period and the large geographical areas as well as a distinct provincialism that characterised some of the groups have contributed to create an artistic melting pot proving problematic to untie. Marinetti himself felt the need to provide some forms of categorisation and at the Quadrennial in Rome (1939) proposed a division of Aeropittura's heterogeneous production.¹ Interestingly, the four sections suggested by Marinetti did not appear to be sufficiently comprehensive and each group was subsequently described by other different characteristics in order to cover the full range of artistic productions. Although, in comparison with pre-war Futurism the artworks are informed by an increasingly figurative quality, the artists' experimentations with different visual solutions resulted in a diverse production which cannot be defined exclusively as either figurative or abstract. The reference to these very figurative aspects has historically caused diffidence and criticism. This often explicit figurative overtone did not increase the popularity of the movement after the Second World War, when Aeropittura's production was often too distant from the conceptual and non-figurative art that developed after in the post-war years. Nevertheless, the new artistic movements that became the protagonists of the cultural scene after 1945 acknowledged the aesthetic influenced inherited from Futurism with particular attention to notions of dynamism, matter and space.

The inconsistencies between the artistic responses, in which later and contemporary artists have incorporated imagery, motifs, subject matter and stylistic elements associated with the

¹ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Mostra Futurista di Aeropittori e Aeroscultori" in *III Quadriennale d'arte nazionale*. exh. cat. Rome (Palazzo delle Esposizioni), 1939, p. 185. 1) Un'aeropittura stratosferica cosmica biochimica (Enrico Prampolini, Munari, Baldassari, Crali...) 2) Un'aeropittura essenziale mistica ascensionale simbolica (Fillia, Oriani, Vottero, Del Bianco Diulgheroff...) 3) Un'aeropittura trasfiguratrice lirica spaziale (Benedetta, Gerardo Dottori, Di Bosso, Caviglioni, Bruschetti, Tano, Monachesi ...) 4) Un'aeropittura sintetica documentaria dinamica di paesaggi e urbanismi visti dall'alto e in velocità (Tato, Ambrosi, Acquaviva, D'Anna...).

Futurist movement into their own work, and scholarly criticism of Futurism represent another anomaly in the reception of the movement. The post-1945 artists turned out to be as vocal as their Futurist ancestors in the expression of their theories in writings and manifestoes. Manifestos can be strange creatures and the attempt at mapping the principles expressed in a text with a visual work of art can sometimes be a very frustrating experience. In an investigation of the theoretical content of a manifesto, identifying whether the document possesses a true programmatic function became decisive. If the programmatic quality of the founding Futurist manifesto is hardly questionable, whether the consequent manifestos retained the same characteristic is debatable. Occasionally, the manifesto format turns out to be more a summary and conceptualisation of ongoing artistic practices rather than the expression of innovative ideological formulations. The manifesto of Aeropittura does not constitute an exception. However, while an interest in flight was already inherent in the Futurist ideology and often expressed in artistic terms, the manifesto contributed to envision a more articulated aerial and spatial aesthetic. Aeropittura physically places the artist on a different spatial dimension arguing that the new location could revolutionise Futurist art. The artists claimed that flight allowed an alternative perception of terrestrial space, urban environment and nature and concurrently an expansion of bodily experiences that consequently informed artistic representation. Due to the demanding and visionary nature of these statements, historians have been inclined to report and cite the ambitious declarations included in the manifesto without providing an accurate consideration of all the implications. Specifically, the questions regarding the origins and cultural sources of Aeropittura's notion of space are still largely unanswered. The link between Futurist artistic practices and the development in Italian aviation is an obvious and evidently valid association but more paths need to be explored. To what extent was the notion of space in fact a new concept and how was this translated in different Futurist artistic productions? In his founding manifesto,

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti claims the death of the traditional notion of time and space and the artist Umberto Boccioni transposed this new aesthetic into visual form thus engaging in a lively debate about the nature of Futurist space in contrast with the interpretation proposed by the Cubists. How does the concept of space in *Aeropittura* demonstrate a continuity with early Futurist art? Moreover, considering the positive artistic response which Futurism has garnered, analysing what the later artists considered to be the fundamental principles and how they reassess them in new artistic contexts and practices may contribute to enhance a contemporary understanding of the Futurist aesthetic and the impact on future generation of artists.

Outline of Chapters

An analysis of the critical responses to *Aeropittura* from the post-war period until the present day will constitute the initial section of this text together with an investigation into the critical reception of Futurism among its contemporaries in the 1930s and after the Second World War. The aim is to try to identify key episodes such as exhibitions, innovative studies and publications that have shaped the conventional interpretation of *Aeropittura* and/or provided groundbreaking new perspectives and vitality to the subject. Particular attention will be paid to events resulting from the celebration of the centenary in 2009 as well as the general attitude towards modern art in Italy that prospered in specific historical and political phases such as post-war reconstruction and the cold war scenario.

In the second chapter the developments of the notion of space within the Futurist aesthetic will be explored in conjunction with a brief investigation of the broad geographical and cultural context, the groundbreaking scientific discoveries and their popularization, the innovations in artistic practices and the pioneering philosophical theories on time and space.

While the continuity with pre-war Futurism will be emphasized, the body of works produced within Aeropittura will constitute the focus of the analysis. The extent to which the pictorial space of Aeropittura has been informed by the popularization of scientific knowledge and to what degree the artistic production embodied continuity and innovation in reference to early Futurism will be two key points of the discussion. How did the artist endeavour to express a different perception of space in painting that could be informed by the practice of flight including elements such as the visual privileged position and a multi-sensorial physical experience central throughout the entire Futurist aesthetic? Flight was not a discovery per se. Some form of flight attempted by means of rudimentary mechanical devices had been achieved a long time before Futurism emerged and different forms of aerial perspective had appeared in Medieval and Renaissance figurations. However, the innovative technological developments surrounding the new aesthetic proposed an original approach with alternative implications to the well established theme of flight. Issues of control and power in reference to the visual sphere and a pantheistic, multi-sensorial approach to nature are some of the themes that will be explored in the text.

A more environmental notion of space will be discussed in the third chapter that concentrates on the architectural theories formulated by the Futurist artists. They translated their general interest in spatiality into an attempt to create and produce an all comprehensive space by deploying different forms of artistic media. Architecture, painting and sculpture became entangled and all indispensable tools to construct both new environments and imaginative forms of pictorial representation. The work and exhibitions featuring *plastica murale*, the exhibition of *Naturismo* and the works for the *Mostra della rivoluzione Fascista* are some of

the case studies discussed in reference to the practical outcomes of a comprehensive concept of space.²

The last chapter addresses the extent to which particular themes of space inherent in late Futurism and Aeropittura impacted on later artworks and how artists developed the spatial Futurist postulates into other forms of artistic practices. In particular, an outline of some different artistic approaches in the post-war era will be followed by a detailed analysis of the open engagement with the Futurist aesthetic by the contemporary artist Luca Buvoli. His original rereading of Futurism ambiguously positioned between academic and artistic criticism represents a valuable case study to discuss contemporary artistic responses to Futurist aesthetics.

Methodology and Sources

The visual sources selected for analysis and included in the text are not limited to any particular geographical area of Italy and similarly while the period covered is evidently identified from 1929 until the late 1930s, the argument is not based on a specific chronological order. At the same time, in order to respect the internal coherence of the movement the text provides a continuous reference to the pre-war development of Futurism. Artists' writings will constitute an important source for this thesis. The Futurists were consistently vocal and prolific both in terms of artistic production and theoretical writings. Manifestos, articles and essays have constituted a central source in any historiography and interpretation of the movement. However, a cautious attitude must be adopted in approaching the Futurist writings and in particular the manifestos. The crucial function of the manifesto as

² *Prima mostra nazionale di plastica murale per l'edilizia Fascista*, Palazzo Ducale, Genova, 1934; *Seconda mostra nazionale di plastica murale per l'edilizia Fascista in Italia e in Africa*, Mercati Traianei, Rome, 1936; *Mostra del Naturismo in Piemonte*, Palazzo della Promotrice, Turin, 1935; *Mostra della rivoluzione Fascista*, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, 1932.

a programmatic document is not always maintained when deployed by the Futurists. If the foundational manifesto published in 1909 is exemplary of the originality and shocking debut of Futurism as an avant-garde movement on the cultural scene, publications of successive manifestos are more representative of a comprehensive theorization of intent and description of artistic practices already in existence rather than the declamation of new policies or plans. In many cases, the manifestos appear to be a platform from which artists and supporters could present and promote their cultural and artistic accomplishments. The majority of the artists' writings examined in the thesis were published in periodicals such as *Stile Futurista*, *Futurismo*, *La Città Nuova* which over time constituted the main theoretical supporters of the movement.³ Moreover, the archival material owned by the *Centro Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo* (CIFS) at the *Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto* (MART) in Italy, with particular attention at the collections of Tullio Crali, Mino Somenzi, Angiolo Mazzoni and the material in the *Centro Apice* at the *Università degli Studi di Milano* are consistently examined in this thesis. Whilst this background research includes a wide examination of different artists' visual and textual production, the ultimate aim is to present not an exhaustive examination of particular sources but, rather, a good cross data examination and selection of specific case studies appropriate to the investigation proposed in the thesis. In order to better understand the artistic vicissitudes in play it is necessary to consider the social and historical context in which the movement operated. Although this thesis will concentrate in the period from 1929 onward, the analysis of the themes and aspects of Aeropittura as a separate entity does not represent in any sense an attempt to undermine the supposed unitary nature of the movement, which still constitutes the main point of reference for the artists operating in the 1930s.

³ *Stile Futurista* (1934-1935); *La Città Nuova* (1932-1934); *Futurismo* (1932-1933). In 1993 the periodical is entitled *Sant'Elia* and between 1934 and 1939 *Artecrazia*.

The founding manifesto was still a strong point of reference for the later Futurist artists. However, the cultural and historical contexts in which these artists lived and worked was very different from 1909 when the Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published his manifesto on the front page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. It is safe to claim that when the great communicator Marinetti published his manifesto, Italy was the exact opposite of what Marinetti envisioned. While the new metropolitan movement celebrated the car and the machine as new cultural symbols, Italian streets were still filled with horses and carriages and the modernity celebrated in the manifesto was still an unfulfilled dream. In this document Marinetti proposed a break with history and tradition that he saw as embodied in the Italian intelligentsia that became the target of his violent verbal aggression. The cultural establishment attacked by Marinetti and his supporters were still at the heart of the Italian intellectual power. Unconcerned about the inherent contradictions between their aspirations and reality, the Futurists translated artistically their fascination with the modern metropolis life, electricity and speed that had to absorb the modern man and profoundly involve the spectator in the scene represented.

Energy, movement, dynamism, glorification of violence all find their place in the revolutionary ideology proposed by Marinetti. The movement did not originate with an obvious artistic nature and throughout forty years of Futurism, the artists deployed a whole different range of media. Nevertheless Futurist painting and sculpture soon became the crown of Futurist production. Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini, Giacomo Balla, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Antonio Sant'Elia, to mention but some, were all active in the first years of Futurism and beyond. After the forced break in artistic practices as a consequence of the outbreak of the First World War, new artistic and intellectual figures were guided by Marinetti in his position of inspirer and driving force of the Futurist activity. Different Futurist groups started to develop in different Italian urban centres and also in more remote

areas of Italian territory, in some cases acquiring specific regional connotations. Among the Futurist artistic productions that developed in the post-war years, Aeropittura exemplifies both the continuity with the original Futurist principles and the ongoing desire of innovation expressed by the artists.

Aeropittura and the Cultural Context

The manifesto of Aeropittura was published in the *Gazzetta del Popolo* on 22nd September 1929 and it was signed by Giacomo Balla, Benedetta, Fortunato Depero, Gerardo Dottori, Fillia, F.T. Marinetti, Enrico Prampolini, Mino Somenzi and Tato. Although this document has to be considered as the official foundation of Aeropittura, preceding events and publications anticipated the emergence of this Futurist artistic production. In Futurist literature the theme of flight appears long before the first work of art on the subject was exhibited. In 1912, Marinetti published a novel entitled *Le monoplan du Pape* in which he presents his anticlerical and anarchic position and deploys the aeroplane as the main means through which the Futurist revolution will be carried out in the early post-war period.⁴ The manifesto of the *Teatro aereo futurista* by Fedele Azari was published in 1919. According to Azari, the striking development in the scope of aviation's project made Italy the perfect setting for the development of the aerial Futurist theatre and the aerial performances. The movements and loops of an aeroplane in flight were reproduced on stage and considered appropriate to convey the different states of mind and human feelings. The final result was a sort of dance that appeared not to be constricted by any gravitational laws. The infiltration of the theme of flight into artistic practice was mainly a consequence of a widespread enthusiasm for aviation that permeated every level of society as well as a consequence of a

⁴ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Le monoplan du Pape* (Paris: Bibliothèque Internationale d'Édition E. Sansot, 1912).

precise political agenda that identified aviation as the perfect tool for its propaganda. In this project the figure of Italo Balbo occupied a strategic position. Balbo became first a famous pilot and then an active member of Mussolini's party as Governor of Libya. His aeronautical enterprises including the crossing of the Atlantic in 1926 were celebrated by the press and his persona was widely eulogized in artistic representations of the period.⁵ Although, Futurist artists included some aeronautical references and aerial perspectives in their works before the mid-twenties the work *Prospettive di volo* (Figure 2 - Perspectives in Flight, 1926c) by Fedele Azari was indicated in the manifesto as the first painting that could rightly symbolise the principles of Aeropittura.⁶ The intertwined geometric forms, executed in bright and contrasting colours, endeavour to represent a view of an urban space during a night flight. The diagonal and raised perspective of these city buildings represented through a diagonal perspective epitomized the sort of dynamic images that the artists involved with Aeropittura wanted to promote.

The 1930s in Italy, the period in which Aeropittura production flourished, are better known for tragic political and historical events than for artistic achievements. Nevertheless, Italian artistic production enjoyed a period of prosperity both in terms of volume and calibre. In 1982, the exhibition entitled *Gli anni trenta. Arte e cultura in Italia* provided an analysis of this neglected decade showing the variety of styles and artistic creations that emerged during the period.⁷ The catalogue precisely describes the political and cultural scenario in Italy in the 1930s, but, unlike more conventional approaches to the period, it does not force an interpretation or provide any moral judgment. In particular, in relation to the artistic panorama, the author acknowledges the ambiguities and compromises that characterised the

⁵ Enrico Prampolini produced the works *Aeroritratto simultaneo di Italo Balbo* (Figure 1) and *Trionfo di Italo Balbo* in 1940.

⁶ Fortunato Depero, *Ritratto psicologico dell'aviatore Azari*, 1922; Bruno Munari *rRrR (Rumore di aeroplano)* 1927c; Gerardo Dottori, *L'aviatore*, 1928; Giacomo Balla, *Esplosione dell'Isola*, 1927.

⁷ Comune di Milano, *Gli anni trenta. Arte e cultura in Italia* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1982).

period and recognises the impossibility of ignoring the impact of the cultural and social context in an interpretation of the art in the 1930s:

Whoever examines the relationship between art and politics in the years of Fascism has to take into account the line of this project coherently developed between many ambiguities, uncertainties and negotiations. It is indispensable to read the reality of the artistic work beyond the net in which they tried to constrain it but also by taking into account its inevitable connection with the daily reality and its alteration.⁸

It was certainly a refreshing approach in comparison with conventional interpretations that considered politics as the driving force, agent and ultimate goal of any artistic production. This latter interpretation is even more debatable in the light of an analysis of the broad artistic panorama of the period. Within an extensive development of different artistic movements and languages Futurism was, particularly at this late stage, only one of the many artistic phenomena and surely not the most successful. Artists fought to find their space among such a variety of artistic expressions when the regime's approval meant not only an increase in artistic status but, more importantly, commissions and professional survival. As the critics have now agreed, the Fascist government never tried to control the arts through the institution of a regime official art. For example, Hans Woller states that despite the repressive actions, the aggressive foreign policy and the racist reprisals in the late 1930s, the Fascist regime had neither the ambitions nor the means to enforce the measures that, conversely, became common practices during the Nazi regime.⁹ Further, as the historian Alberto Acquarone has

⁸ Ibid, p. 52. "Chi guarda il rapporto tra arte e politica nella cultura italiana degli anni del fascismo non può non tener conto delle linee di questo progetto coerentemente sviluppato fra mille ambiguità, incertezze e patteggiamenti. È fondamentale leggere la realtà del lavoro artistico oltre la griglia nella quale si cercò di vincolarlo, ma anche delle connessioni inevitabili con la quotidiana realtà, con il suo inornabile mutamento".

⁹ Hans Woller, *I conti con il Fascismo: l'epurazione in Italia, 1943-1948* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), p. 95. "D'altra parte è anche vero che il sistema repressivo non fu mai così rigido, che le ambizioni di mobilitazione e di inquadramento della società non furono mai così conseguenti e soprattutto che la volontà di pulizia razziale non fu mai così marcata da poter senz'altro considerare il regime Fascista totalitario allo stesso modo della dittatura nazista, dovevano sempre confrontarsi e mediare con le forze monarchico-conservatrici".

argued, Fascism was a regime that failed to become totalitarian.¹⁰ Other scholars support this interpretation in reference to a more specific analysis of the cultural panorama. Phillip Cannistraro points out that while Fascism unquestionably undermined intellectual freedom, the disorganisation and fragmentation of the power resulted in a situation in which artists and scholars who did not openly act against the political power were able to carry on their research and activities.¹¹ As a case study, he mentions the philosopher Benedetto Croce and the publication of his periodical *La Critica* as the most apparent demonstration of the regime's failure to impose a total control over Italian culture. By examining the *veline*, a form of brief instructions released by the regime and addressed to the press, it is striking to see the numerous times the officers repeated the directives, mainly due to the negligence on the part of the press to comply with the instructions given. In art, the term 'degenerate' faced a strong criticism and the project of erasing any form of modern production proved impossible to implement in Italy due to the opposition of the artists themselves. Instead, despite difficulties, modern art and architecture was still sponsored and exhibited throughout the 1930s. Cannistraro points out that Mussolini was more occupied in showing that he was in control of cultural production rather than actively exercising repression:

It is true that the regime destroyed in principle, the cultural freedom of several Italian scholars and artists, but it also true that it did very little in order to modify their attitude or the very nature of their work. The majority of the artists continued to paint in the style they preferred [...] the majority of writers wrote what they thought was important and they went on researching and publishing without being disturbed by the official directives.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

¹¹ Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso: Fascismo e mass media* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1975), p. 54.

¹² Ibid., p. 54. "La maggior parte degli artisti continuò a dipingere nello stile che preferiva [...] Il grosso dei letterati scriveva ciò che gli sembrava importante, e un gran numero di studiosi proseguì le sue ricerche (continuando a pubblicare i suoi libri) senza che le pronunce ufficiali li disturbassero".

Despite the fact that in some cases artists needed to keep a low profile in order to survive professionally and avoid attracting much attention to their work, the lack of a precise Fascist cultural policy allowed many artists to continue working as long as they showed loyalty to the political system. When signs of impatience towards the establishment were evident Mussolini was ready to intervene. For example he personally demanded the suppression of the periodical published by the artistic movement *Corrente* where scholars and artists who opposed the cultural principles of the regime found in the periodical a platform to express their ideas. Generally speaking, instead of persecuting the cultural opponents, the regime preferred to ignore their existence and keep a distant control ready to act before the situation could degenerate in open resistance. The movement *Corrente* managed to stay active until 1943 and the artists continued to produce and exhibit their works until 1945 and some became key figures of the post-war cultural milieu.

Futurism and Aeropittura participated in the fierce race to gain the regime's approval and the consequent benefits. Günter Berghaus claims that the Futurist movement developed somehow independently from Fascism and in some cases even from Marinetti.¹³ Discussing the evident marginal role of Futurism in the later period and Marinetti's attempt to find some form of recognition, he explains how the "fight for survival in a hostile environment became the main motto of Marinetti's Futurist movement from 1924 onwards".¹⁴ At the very moment when the regime wanted to legitimise itself through an association with the Italian past, the Roman Empire and the classical tradition, the Futurist's aesthetic praise of modernity was not germane to the regime's goals. In a discussion in relation to the connections between art and politics, the historian Carlo Bordini states:

¹³ Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

Mussolini's political turning-point from a revolutionary conception that could fit with the anarchical and whimsical Futurist principles had to express a new official image even in the artistic field; a new doctrine inspired by serenity, classical majesty and beauty: to recover the previous Italian tradition that was rejected in the "revolutionary" moment.¹⁵

An analysis of the trends in the purchases made by the government to improve the state art gallery illustrates the preference shown by the regime in the 1930s. Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris reports that, despite the fact that the Futurists exhibited ninety-five works at the Biennale in 1934, only one was sold to the State.¹⁶ A similar trend is shown for other events such as the Quadrennial in 1931 and again in 1939. Rosazza-Ferraris explains that "apart from a few exceptions the aeropainters enjoyed only a modest success. This represents a clear symptom of the sort of distrust that seems to characterise the central power of the State towards these artists".¹⁷ Giovanna Bonsegale confirms a similar trend when she discusses the purchasing of Aeropittura's works by the state in the 2008 publication *I Futuristi e le Quadriennali*.¹⁸ In the introduction of her chapter she reports the comment of the Italian journalist Arnaldo Frateili, in reference to the presence of Futurists at the III Rome Quadrennial: "There are, it is true, the small rooms with the Futurists but they do not disturb: they stand aside, in an atmosphere that it can be found in a section for advertising material or museum with flags of old

¹⁵ Carlo Bordini, *Cultura e propaganda nell'Italia Fascista* (Messina-Firenze: D'Anna, 1974), p. 63. "La svolta politica di Mussolini dalla concezione rivoluzionaria della prima ora che poteva benissimo andare d'accordo con il ribellismo anarcoide e l'estrosità Futurista, deve esprimere secondo a nuova concezione di dottrina d'ordine, un'immagine ufficiale, anche in campo artistico, ispirata alla serenità, al senso di maestosità e di bellezza classica: recuperare cioè la tradizione culturale dell'arte italiana precedente al fascismo, che nel momento 'rivoluzionario' era stata respinta".

¹⁶ Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris, "Gli Aeropittori e lo Stato: committenze e acquisizioni" in Bruno Mantura, Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris, Livia Velani, *Mostra dell'aria e della sua conquista* (Rome: De Luca, c1989), pp. 29-32.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 31. "Tranne poche eccezioni, gli aeropittori godono anche in patria di un modesto successo, sintomo evidente che quella sorta di diffidenza che sembra caratterizzare il potere centrale dello Stato nei confronti di questi artisti [...]".

¹⁸ Giovanna Bonsegale, "Il Governatorato di Roma lesina gli acquisti" in Gino Agnese, Giovanna Bonasegale, Enrico Crispolti eds. *I Futuristi e le Quadriennali* (Milan: Electa, 2009).

battles”.¹⁹ Bonsegale continues by mentioning that in the second quadrennial only the Futurist work *Marinaio dello spazio* (*Marinetti poeta del Golfo della Spezia*) by Enrico Prampolini was purchased to be placed in the prestigious Galleria Mussolini by Giuseppe Bottai, who despite his positions, first as governor of Rome and then minister of education was always involved in the organisation of the quadrennials. While at the III Quadrennial three Futurist works were purchased (*Vite orizzontale*, *Aeropittura*, and *Sogno di motore*), at the next quadrennial all the Futurist works were left unsold. In total, during the four Quadrennials held in Rome in 1931, 1935, 1939 and 1943 the Futurists exhibited three hundred and sixteen works and but only twenty-four works were sold. According to Rosazza-Ferraris, the works that are now in the State collections are a consequence of the generosity and intelligence of some collectors who, in the 1950s, prevented many works from being purchased by foreign buyers. This shows how the unpopularity that *Aeropittura* suffered in the 1930s remained largely unchanged in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Aeropittura attempted to gain some space and visibility in the artistic scene by emphasising their connection with key figures of the early development of Futurism like Boccioni and Sant’Elia. Interestingly, both these influential figures were systematically deployed by artists and critics in the period to epitomize completely different, and at times contradictory, elements ranging from a specific form of Italian creative geniality, modernity, innovation, tradition and continuity with the artistic Italian past. If the Futurists were keen to stress their natural legacy with Boccioni and Sant’Elia and consequently describe themselves as the legitimate heirs, the opponents of Futurism identified in those artists the ‘real’ Futurism that was different from the one reappraised in their time. After the war Boccioni and Sant’Elia appeared to be conveniently distanced from any suggestion of an association with Fascism.

¹⁹ Bonsegale, p. 73. “Ci sono, è vero, le salette dei futuristi, ma non danno fastidio: se ne stanno in disparte, con un’aria tra di repartio per cartelli pubblicitari e di museo per bandiere di vecchie battaglie”.

Their deaths before the end of the First World War allowed them to be idealised as champions of Futurism, avoiding all the later controversial implications.

More importantly, it was the influence, reputation and personal relationships between Marinetti and Mussolini that allowed the Futurist to survive. Despite the decreasing popularity of Futurism in the 1930s, Mussolini awarded Marinetti the title of *Accademico d'Italia* in 1929. The Futurist was often a protagonist in the press but not always the subject of positive reviews. Increasingly unpopular in the artistic and cultural world, he was mainly accused of marketing Futurism at all costs and of recycling an already dead movement. Carlo Carrà who was an active member of the Futurist movement at the beginning of his career, later on became particularly critical about Marinetti and his followers. In the press, he repeatedly accused Marinetti of being ignorant and incompetent about art, claiming that Futurism died with the First World War. In an article signed by Carrà in *L'Ambrosiano*, the target becomes Aeropittura. Carrà particularly disapproved of the alleged 'eclecticism' that characterised Aeropittura's production: claiming that too many different styles were included under the umbrella of Aeropittura underlying a striking lack of originality that could only lead to the complete disappearance and oblivion of Aeropittura and its art.²⁰

While Carrà criticised the anachronistic presence of Futurism *per se*, others were still supporters of the original idea of Futurism and became much more focused in targeting the development of Futurism proposed by Marinetti in the 1930s. In a sense the movement had to defend itself not only from the anti-Futurist lobby but also from other Futurists. From 1934 Lino Cappuccio began the publication of a periodical entitled *Nuovo Futurismo*. Claudia Salaris in *Artecrazia* explains how this publication was a dissident expression of the Futurist

²⁰ Car. III.77; Car. II 893 Carlo Carrà, "Cronaca delle mostre. Pittura programmatica", *L'Ambrosiano*, February-March 1938. [Page not given].

agenda proposed by Marinetti and Somenzi.²¹ On the front cover of the May 1934 issue Cappuccio states that his contemporary Futurism was not a serious expression of the original principles of the movement and since Marinetti had exhausted his function as leader and founder, it would have been appropriate to resign and pass the leadership onto some younger members.²² In his publication Cappuccio also discussed the very essence of the concept of Futurism itself. In the article “Agonia di un movimento” he states:

Futurism is a general term that identifies a spiritual movement that characterises our time. This is not related at all with the Futurist Movement founded by Marinetti and his most loyal followers. It is so true that there are in fact many Futurists outside of the movement scattered here and there or grouped in a nucleus of a few members or in more unified divisions, as in the case of the members of the Independent Italian Futurism.²³

In effect Cappuccio criticises Futurism and Marinetti using some of the arguments that will reappear after the Second World War. For example, according to Cappuccio, by recognising Fascism, Futurism had renounced far too many of the cardinal and original principles. Moreover, too many inferior quality works were produced, the anti-academic approach that was at the root of the Futurist ideology resulted in a sick academism and the obsession with the manifesto culminated in an endless pathetic publication of useless documents. The periodical *Futurismo* directed by Mino Somenzi was the main target of the attack: the editor was accused of being an incompetent amateur, a man of undoubted patriotism but with questionable critical and aesthetic skills who had the very irritating habit of accusing everyone of antifascism as an immediate reaction to every form of criticism: “We admire

²¹ Claudia Salaris, *Artecrazia: L'avanguardia futurista negli anni del Fascismo* (Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1992).

²² Lino Cappuccio, “Serieta in Arte”, *Nuovo Futurismo*, 30 May 1934, p.1.

²³ Lino Cappuccio, “Agonia di un movimento”, *Nuovo Futurismo*, 15 June 1934, p. 1. “Infatti Futurismo è un termine generale che indica una corrente spirituale caratteristica del nostro tempo, nulla ha a che vedere con il ‘Movimento Futurista’ di Marinetti e seguaci prossimi. Tanto è vero che vi sono Futuristi e moltissimi anche al di fuori del movimento Futurista, sparsi qua e là o raggruppati in nuclei di poche unità o in compatte falangi, come gli aderenti al Futurismo Italiano indipendente”.

Mino Somenzi, *squadrista* and Fascist, but we suggest to him that he not muddle inappropriately the term Fascism with anything he can lay his hands on!”²⁴ Although Cappuccio often provides a positive account of some artists involved with Aeropittura such as Benedetta and Fillia, he is often very critical in reference to some paintings and also literary works affiliated to *Aeropoesia*. In an article he states: “And in reference to this [poetry], we want to know how it is possible to define *aeropoesia* the poem *Fascismo* by Pino Masnata, published in the October issue of *Stile Futurista*. Unless *poetry of air* rather means *groundless*...”²⁵

As discussed above, the analysis of national artistic events such as the Quadrennial are useful to give a sense of how the different forms of art in the 1930s interact with each other and what specific position the Futurists occupied in this panorama.

The Biennale was another key cultural and artistic institution in Italy. During the Fascist years the Biennale came increasingly under the control of the state and membership in the Fascist party became vital for artists in order to participate at the Biennale’s events. Giuliana Tomasella in her study *Biennali di Guerra* considers crucial the appointment of the artist Antonio Maraini in the transition between the *Biennale di Venezia* to *Biennale di Stato* that took place during the Fascist years.

The fact that, from 1932, he [Antonio Maraini] became also responsible of the *Sindacato Nazionale delle Belle Arti* determines a particular situation. This inextricably linked the most important Italian artistic exposition to the structures and needs of the corporative state. The membership to the *sindacato nazione* [trade union] became the *conditio sine qua non* to be able to exhibit at the Biennial and the person responsible for the interest of the artists was at the same time

²⁴ Ibid., p. 1. “Ammiriamo Mino Somenzi, squadrista e fascista, ma gli consigliamo di non mescolare a sproposito il termine fascismo con tutto ciò che gli capita fra le mani”.

²⁵ *Nuovo Futurismo*, (Not title given, Column on the right: 0.000), 15 December 1934, p. 6. “E a proposito di queste vogliamo sapere come si fa a battezzare aeropoesia il poema parolibero Fascismo di Pino Masnata che Stile Futurista pubblica nel numero di ottobre. A meno che aeropoesia non significhi poesia campata in aria”.

in charge of the choice of who was going to exhibit. In this way, the structure to which the artists had to subordinate became very rigid.²⁶

Although in 1932 the Biennale passed under the control of the regime, the variety and wide range of artists who participated at the event seems to demonstrate that this shift had a very limited effect on the very lively artistic atmosphere. Many important critics of the time participated in the organisation of the Biennale by writing in the catalogue and contributing to various aspect of the promotion. However, Marinetti was normally the only one to comment and write the introductions to the Futurist works for the catalogue. The general feeling is that, although the Futurists with *Aeropittura* were physically taking part at the exhibitions, they were not really integrated with the rest of the material exhibited. They were given rooms that were left over or occupied a marginal role in the exhibition space, such as the Soviet Pavilion for which Marinetti fought and eventually managed to obtain, allowing him to avoid the humiliation of not taking part at one of the main Italian artistic events.²⁷ On other occasions, the catalogue does not fail to mention that the Futurists were occupying a room that had its own entrance from outside, stressing their marginal role in the show.²⁸ The participation of the Futurists at the Biennials has often been seen as a reflection of favouritism granted to Futurism by the regime and a demonstration that their position was not so marginalised.²⁹ However, their inclusion can also be interpreted as a way of avoiding unnecessary confrontations with the artists and as a concession to the peculiar figure of Marinetti; a sort of personal favour to someone who had played such a key role in promoting the idea of

²⁶ Giuliana Tomasella, *Biennali di guerra: arte e propaganda negli anni del conflitto: 1939-1944* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2001), p. 17. "Il fatto che dal 1932 (Antonio Marain) divenga contemporaneamente responsabile del sindacato Nazionale Belle Arti determina una situazione del tutto particolare in quanto lega in modo ancora più stretto la maggiore esposizione italiana alle strutture ed esigenze dello stato corporativo. L'iscrizione al sindacato nazionale diventa la condizione sine qua non per poter esporre alla Biennale e il responsabile degli interessi della corporazione degli artisti è nello stesso tempo preposto alla scelta degli espositori; si crea così un sistema di inquadramento molto rigido cui gli artisti devono sottostare".

²⁷ In 1936 the Soviet Union did not take part in the Biennale and the unused pavilion was allocated to the Futurists.

²⁸ Introduction: Biennale catalogue 1936 and 1934.

²⁹ Giorgia Bottinelli, *The Art of Dissent in Fascist Italy: the Bottai Years, 1936-1943* (Ph.D Thesis).

modernity, which was so important in the first years of the regime's cultural campaign. Despite the fact that Berghaus thinks that the efficacy of Futurist art declined in the 1930s, he states that the artists needed Marinetti as a 'father and protector' in order to take part in exhibitions, publish books etc.³⁰

The atmosphere of indifference seems to have deeply affected some of the artists and supporters of the movement. Mino Somenzi, who actively supported Futurism with the publication of the periodical with the same name, almost begged for attention and for financial support.³¹ The substantial amount of written material on Futurism and Aeropittura should not deceive; it is not necessarily a sign of a general and lively interest in the movement. The publications and events organised are often self-referential: the same group of people writing about themselves in their own publications. Since Aeropittura and Futurism did not reflect the ideology of the Fascist programme any more, the attention paid to their activities was very limited. The text of the introduction of the 1930 Biennale underlines the importance of promoting the resumption of the glorious Italian tradition: "the sane and instinctive taste of beauty to which Raffaello was devoted the symmetry and proportion that Michelangelo called 'expressivity' and such character as Leonardo showed".³² Despite the clear political orientation, the Biennale was still recognised as the main showcase of Italian art in the 1930s even by the most important critics such as Lionello Venturi and Roberto Longhi. Venturi, who wrote the introduction for the retrospective on Modigliani, which was part of the Biennale in 1930, did not have a good opinion of Marinetti and Futurism. Indeed, they had a protracted argument that was widely reported in the press. The quarrel concerned

³⁰ Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction 1909-1944* (Providence & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996). Also see Günter Berghaus, "Il secondo Futurismo e il regime Fascista", *Terzoocchio*, December 1997, n. 4 (85).

³¹ Som IX.12 (MART Archive)

³² *XVII. Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia, 1930: Catalogo*. (Venezia: Ferrari, 1930), p. 1. "Il gusto istintivo sano e bello della bellezza come fu caro a Raffaello, della simmetria e delle proporzioni come diceva Michelangelo, dell'espressione e del carattere come insegnava Leonardo".

the possibility that university students could be asked to prepare for an examination on Futurism. Venturi was a university professor and he accused Futurism of being culturally inadequate, and thus, from an academic point of view, an unacceptable subject.

However, it is important to remember that the distrust towards Futurism in the period was not just a consequence of a criticism particularly direct towards Marinetti's movement but it can be interpreted as a part of a general climate in Italy, and in Europe, that favoured classical themes in art rather than modernist artistic accounts. As Elizabeth Cowling explains in the exhibition catalogue *On Classic Ground*, the return to order and classical revival "gathered momentum during the First World War in France and Italy, and spread rapidly after peace was declared".³³ The return to the figurative promoted in Italy by artists such as Ardengo Soffici, Achille Funi and Mario Sironi among others was informed by strong references to classicism, *mediterraneità* and national identity. Symbols of national past were appropriated and reconstructed for political purposes. Not only the Roman legacy that constituted the most know example of the Fascism's engagement with the past, but, as the study *Donatello Among the Blackshirts* illustrates, Renaissance artists such as Donatello and poets like Francesco Petrarca and Giacomo Leopardi were included in cultural and political propaganda.³⁴ Academic study in the period contributed to popularise the revival of an interest in the Italian artistic past. In 1927, Roberto Longhi, still today considered one of the more renowned Italian art historians, published a monograph about Piero della Francesca,³⁵ and the year before Venturi published *Il gusto dei Primitivi*.³⁶ The two texts were considered groundbreaking at the time and are still part of the university syllabus. Longhi rejected the avant-garde, the *Metafisica* and wished that Italian artists re-establish stronger connections

³³ Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Leger, De Chirico and the New Classicism 1910-1930* (Mustang: Tate Publishing, 1990), p. 11.

³⁴ Claudia Lazzaro ed. *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

³⁵ Roberto Longhi, *Piero della Francesca* (Rome: Valori Plastici, 1927).

³⁶ Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei Primitivi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1926).

with the Italian painters of the fourteenth century. In his study, Venturi argued that the art of the 'primitives' was a consequence of a revelation, a sort of mystic disclosure. Because of their *mystic élan* the medieval and early Renaissance painters transcend realistic representation and classical proportions in order to distance themselves from the terrestrial dimension and to get closer to the divine world.³⁷ Venturi describes the consequences of this art in terms of individuality, passion, synthetic representation and a closer relationship between the viewer and the artist, who now communicate to each other on the basis of pure passion and emotion.³⁸

Although, traditionally Futurism is famous for rejecting tradition and history proposing itself as a symbol of modernity, the general climate of the 1930s impacted upon Futurist art. This atmosphere, permeated with the spirituality described by Venturi, does not seem so distant from the mystical and supernatural sensations that pervade some of the concepts of *Aeropittura* expressed by Fillia in his work *Spiritualità Futurista*.³⁹ In the third chapter of this thesis the ideas of synthesis and spirituality are analysed in reference to some of the work of aeropainters. In his study, Venturi continues his chronological examination with the work of Brunelleschi and the concept of Renaissance perspective. He states that perspective was not only the result of a sharp observation of reality but also a consequence of geometrical knowledge, a reflection of outstanding intellectuality.⁴⁰ Therefore if the development of perspective in art was a consequence of a new geometrical culture, this implies that the previous art was not strictly intellectual or based on a high standard of culture yet, in his argument, this does not undermine its value. Instead, the lack of knowledge and culture

³⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 51. "Abolito l'intermediario della natura fisica, esclusa la ragione che è lenta a svolgersi, realizzato il miracolo dell'immanenza di Dio, l'artista poté rivelare il suo abbandono spontaneo, il suo puro amore, la sua fiamma viva con una rapidità e una intensità degna del baleno. Tra l'artista e l'osservatore la comunicazione fu più diretta. L'individualità dell'opera d'arte fu accentuata, perchè il suo valor soggettivo non fu più condizionato e misurato dall'oggettività della natura, perchè soltanto all'artista toccò di parlare."

³⁹ Fillia, "Spiritualità Futurista", *Oggi e Domani*, Rome, 26 October 1931.

⁴⁰ Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei Primitivi*, p. 70.

seems to be the key to the successful mystical and intuitive approach to reality shown by the primitives. When applied to the Futurists, the supposed lack of culture and intuitive approach becomes a valid reason to dismiss their works as inadequate.

The aspect of Venturi's argument that really influenced the cultural and artistic panorama was his idea that the style of primitives can be found in the art of any period of time: "[..] it cannot be limited to interpret the works of art of a particular historical period. In fact the taste of the primitives is an essential aspect and therefore eternal of art, every authentic work of art presents that aspect to different degrees".⁴¹ The Futurists themselves were very concerned about the non-intellectual nature of their art. Boccioni underlined the intuitive nature of Futurist art and Prampolini strongly reacted against the accusation of intellectualism against his technique *polimaterismo*. Many artists were fascinated by Venturi's argument. The *aeropittori* went to Padua to study the Scrovegni Chapel to get inspiration from the 'synthetism' of masses and volumes that allowed Venturi to draw a link between Giotto and Cézanne. In his introduction to the Biennale's catalogue, Marinetti emphasised the mysterious forces that inspire the artist to push their creativity beyond their human possibilities and means. In the case of Aeropittura, the mysterious forces can be described as the supernatural possibilities that the aeroplane as mechanical and technological means could offer. Despite the obvious differences between the aeropainters' theories and those of Venturi, they have in common a fervour for a sort of mysticism that is a combination of mysterious forces, spirituality and supernatural intuitivism in the process of creativity.

In 1931 Aeropittura's aesthetic theories and artistic production had a resonance both at national and international level. In this year important exhibitions specifically dedicated to Aeropittura were held in Italy such as at the *Camerata degli Artisti* in Rome and at the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 222. "Non può limitarsi a interpretare le opere d'arte di un periodo storico particolare. Poiché il gusto dei primitivi è un aspetto essenziale, e quindi eterno dell'arte, in maggiore o in minor grado ogni autentica opera d'arte presenta sempre quell'aspetto".

Galleria Pesaro in Milan. According to Riccardo Averini “only the exhibition in Rome in 1931 marked the beginning of Aeropittura. From that very moment Marinetti talked only about Aeropittura, Aeroscultura and Aeropoesia. The word Futurism itself faded away”.⁴² Three years later, in the 1934 Biennale, Marinetti stated that the Futurists decided to present only aeropaintings in order to give unity to the exhibition. The fact that the initiator of Futurism opted for a show that was exclusively dedicated to Aeropittura in such an important context as the Biennale means that at that moment it constituted the major force of Futurism, or indeed epitomized Futurist art itself. The Biennale in 1934 was to some extent a success for Aeropittura. Miracco in the catalogue of a recent exhibition reports Marinetti’s claim that:

....the decisive importance of an Italian aeropainting movement which, with the complete triumph of Fascist aviation, cut itself off from terrestrial forms already painted or sung, to express instead dynamically without analysis and with abstract synthesis, all the ‘external internal’ sky of the fatherland.⁴³

In 1931 the Futurists published the *Manifesto dell’arte sacra futurista* and the *Manifesto dell’aeropoesia*. Moreover from 1931 they directed their interest and studies towards new theories in architecture. Fillia published a work entitled *La nuova architettura* that included essays of several internationally renowned architects such as Le Corbusier and Gropius.⁴⁴ In 1932 Fillia started the publication of a periodical entitled *La Città Nuova*, which was very much permeated by Rationalist theories. The *Manifesto dell’architettura aerea*, signed by the architect Angiolo Mazzoni among others, was published in 1934. In the same period many exhibitions were held not only in Italy but also France, Germany, Turkey and Greece.⁴⁵ In the

⁴² Riccardo Averini, “L’Aeropittura Futurista in Italia”, *Ciampino*, July, 1953, p. 16.

⁴³ Renato Miracco, *Futurist Skies. Italian Aeropainting* (Milan: Mazzotta, 2004), p. 21.

⁴⁴ Fillia ed. *La nuova architettura* (Turin: UTET, 1931).

⁴⁵ Paris (1931, 1932, 1935), Istanbul (1933), Athens (1933), Hamburg (1934), Lion (1934), Berlin (1934).

second part of the 1930s, due to the terrible developments in national and foreign politics, the artistic activities of the Futurists were almost exclusively concentrated in Italy itself.

However, in the first half of the 1930s and despite the fact that Futurist artists proved to be active in promoting their art production and theories, the artistic panorama was indubitably dominated by other movements. The Quadrennial in 1931 was a whirl of classical images only briefly intercalated by a few Futurist paintings that are not mentioned in any general introduction. In contrast, in the same Biennale, Sironi, Soffici and Carrà who associated themselves with the *Novecento* movement held personal exhibitions. Conventionally the new neoclassical style of *Novecento* art promoted by Margherita Sarfatti that could count on the support of the important artist Mario Sironi as a valuable member was considered the most successful example of art of the period.⁴⁶ In the Biennale in 1932 the response was unfortunately very similar and once again it is only Marinetti who introduced and discussed the exhibited Futurist production in the catalogue. The omnipresence of Marinetti in any manifestation of Futurism caused not only the assimilation of the art with his personality, but also created some discontent among other active supporters of the movement and outsiders as Lino Capuccio and his periodical *Nuovo Futurismo* demonstrates. Even a loyal follower like Somenzi complained about the exploitation of Aeropittura and the modifications made by Marinetti to some fundamental principles of the movement.⁴⁷ He also stated that Marinetti promised to inform Mussolini of Somenzi's devotion, but he never did. Futurism was isolated in the artistic world but at the same time dominated by Marinetti's strong personality.

The participation of Aeropittura at the Biennale in 1936 repeated the trend of the preceding shows. Once again the catalogue stated that some space was reserved for the Futurists and a

⁴⁶ *Novecento* was founded in 1922 in Milan and among its members were some of the most popular and known artists of the time. They rejected abstract art and the avant-garde proposing instead a figurative language inspired by the traditional Italian art of the *Trecento* and *Quattrocento* and historical painting.

⁴⁷ Som. I. 1 36 (MART Archive).

subtle criticism of their works was not spared. The preface to the catalogue implicitly criticised modern art when it stated that some “excesses of some juvenile groups that deceive themselves and want to shock with their originality has been admitted [at the Biennale] as an expression of any new generation’s desire to create everything new around them”.⁴⁸ More than a general criticism of modern art, this condescension was specifically addressed at Futurism and Aeropittura, which failed to be as figurative as was required by the artistic context but not sufficiently abstract and avant-garde to be completely dismissed.

It is a remarkable fact that despite a strong criticism of Aeropittura the movement was always admitted to this important exhibition. In the preface, Marinetti concentrated attention on the problems of representing paintings of war. At this point, an attempt to pursue an artistic analysis becomes increasingly complicated. Miracco says:

Marinetti published the ‘demented’ *Futurist Manifesto of the New Aesthetic of War* and the *Futurist Manifesto of the Aeropainting of Bombing*. The spirit of exploration has become the spirit of war and the drive towards the infinite has become fear of death. This was the real fall after having given expression to emotionally unrepeatable sensations, fundamental for the understanding of modern Italian art.⁴⁹

Interpreting Marinetti’s words as representative of the entire Futurist artistic community may turn out to be very reductive. Although support for war informed Futurism as ideology and the works of single artists producing during the period between 1930 and 1940 cannot be judged by some questionable publications produced by Marinetti and the visually overt artistic support to the war by some artists. Many artists kept painting without necessarily associating their works with Fascism or the war and in 1939 the section dedicated to

⁴⁸ 20. *Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, 1936: Catalogo* (Venezia: Officine grafiche Carlo Ferrari, 1936), p. 29. “Qualche eccesso di gruppo giovanili che qua e là si illudono e si compiacciono di far strabiliare con sfoggi di originalità è stato ammesso come espressione di quel bisogno che ha sempre sospinto ogni afflusso di generazioni nuove a ricreare tutto intorno a sé”.

⁴⁹ Miracco, p. 23.

Aeropittura in the Biennale catalogue is much more concentrated on synthetic representation, simplification and abstraction than reference to war paintings.

Publications, Periodicals and Events

Marinetti and Aeropittura's supporters spread their ideas through the organisation of events and the publication of book and periodicals. They may not have been able to compete with *Novecento* and its popularity but they created a range of activities and loyal followers. The periodical *Futurismo* was probably the main publication deployed to support the movement in the early 1930s. *Futurismo* started in 1932 but after two years it was renamed *Sant'Elia* stressing the increasing popularity of architecture and finally *Artecrazia*, which was published until 1939. The tone of the periodical was often very rhetorical and celebratory towards both Fascism and Futurism with regular attempts to find similarities and correspondences between the two operations. Somenzi was always over enthusiastic about Mussolini, and even when he questioned some of his decisions and policies, he justified Mussolini's behaviour by identifying some improprieties in the actions of other members of the party (a technique widely deployed by Mussolini himself). The events organised by *Futurismo* are always advertised and Marinetti is a constant presence in the periodical.

Special events such as *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* in 1932 are extensively described in the journal. The exhibition organised in Rome was a major event both from a social and artistic point of view. Important studies by Jeffrey Schnapp and Claudio Fogu have underlined the importance of this event in a study of visual culture in the Fascist period.⁵⁰

The wide participation of different artists, styles and languages have interested scholars of

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Schnapp, "Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution" in Richard J. Golsan ed. *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (New York: Upne, 1992) and Claudio Fogu, *The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

Italian visual culture. This thesis will include a brief analysis of the exhibition in relation to how it was perceived by the Futurists and the way it was discussed in the Futurist press. The exhibition aimed to document and celebrate ostentatiously the history and presumed successes of Fascism. In the guide to the exhibition the technical details concerning the organisation were obsessively reported in order to prove the exceptional character of the event. The façade of the exposition palace was changed to meet the scenographical demand of the show. The letters that displayed the name of the exhibition were 160 cm high with four vertical and incredibly high *fasci* to contrast the horizontality of the name. About 20,000 objects were exhibited over the two floors of the building. On the ground floor, the history of Fascism was represented by highlighting key events and dates such as the foundation, the war, the victory and the recapture of Fiume. On the first floor, other themes were shown such as the *fasci* abroad, the spirit and the work in the Fascist era. The room F was conceived by Prampolini who was in charge of conveying the atmosphere of the early years of the regime. Prampolini opted for a Futurist environment. The room was “conceived according to that spatial dynamism that characterised Futurism of that time”.⁵¹ Despite the fact that Prampolini’s work was praised as a very effective installation, the impression remains that Futurism was seen more as something that belonged to the past than something still alive. This is clearly in contrast to the description of Sironi’s room provided in the catalogue praised as an artist who avoided “solutions inspired by some ultramodern aesthetics; he created decoration, symbols, architecture and ‘chromatism’ with a typical Italian geniality”.⁵² In the catalogue, the term ‘modernism’ was always deployed with some level of negative

⁵¹ Dino Alfieri and Luigi Freddi eds. *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista* (Rome: Partito Nazionale Fascista, 1933), p. 46.

⁵² Ibid., p. 193. “soluzioni ispirate da certi estetismi ultra modernisti, creando con genialità tipicamente italiana decorazioni e simboli, architetture e cromatismi rispondenti in modo assoluto alla severità del tema che univa in sé anche la necessità della impostazione e della risoluzione dei problemi tutt’affatto nuovi e gravi, originali e solenni.”

connotation. In reference to Prampolini's work on the first floor the guide to the exhibition states:

.....here the concepts acquire a very elegant and original representative aspect. Prampolini has given to this room - distinct from the one on the ground floor - a severe and architectonic constructive character. In his plastic creation, there is a perfect balance among all parts and constructive atmosphere with its expression of force and lyricism dominated the room. The people who feared the poor Futurist demonstrative clarity have been proved wrong by the final result.⁵³

Futurism was not deemed suitable for representing "The Italian activities of the Fascist Regime," which was the theme of the room. The organisers of the exhibition were so relieved that Prampolini did not deploy 'the Futurist style' to represent this theme. It is interesting to note that Prampolini was one of the first Futurist artists to be 'rediscovered' after the war. His association with Fascism during the organization of this sort of event has never been an impediment. Despite his active association with Fascism, the majority of his art possesses a sort of neutrality that allowed a successful de-contextualisation. On the other hand, in the case of other artists, 'the visual proof' of their presumed association with the political ideology can be identified in the works themselves. It would be interesting to discuss on what basis the allegation of collaborationism can be justified and whether the reproduction of symbols that could have political connotations is considered more important than an active participation in the activities of the regime. The attempt to interpret an artistic movement in terms of political associations can become a schizophrenic effort.

The aim of this massive exhibition was to inform and celebrate the foundation and development of Fascism. The scenographical characteristics were there to testify to the

⁵³ *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, p. 220. "Concetti assumono qui un aspetto rappresentativo d'una eleganza, di una eloquenza veramente originali. Enrico Prampolini ha conferito a questa sala – a differenza del dinamismo dei suoi due pannelli esposti nella Sala F al piano inferiore – un aspetto di severo e architettonico carattere costruttivo. Nella sua ideazione plastica vi è un perfetto equilibrio fra tutte le parti della sala e vi domina un'atmosfera costruttiva che emana un'espressione di forza e di lirismo. A chi temeva la poca chiarezza dimostrativa dello stile Futurista, questa sala di Prampolini serve di assoluta smentita".

greatness of the regime, underlining the social utility of the project including the fact that the organisation of the exhibition was also an occasion to provide work to more than a thousand people every day for months. Completely different artistic styles were tolerated and even used by the Fascist regime in order to promote their ideology taking advantage of different kinds of art that could represent different historical moments and aspects of the regime itself. The exhibition of Fascist revolution has been used by scholars to demonstrate that lack of cultural policy in the Fascist regime that just chose what was more suitable in different moments of their political project and shaped it according to the political agenda. Marla Stone argues:

The concept of 'Fascist culture' is considered imprecise and in flux – the product of a constant negotiation between the dictatorship's interests and the cultural tastes of artists and spectators. The following discussion of state patronage stands within the critical tradition that views the dictatorship as unstable, shifting and contested at both the ideological and functional level.⁵⁴

On a different level, artists belonging to different artistic movements of the period were keen to take part in any form of artistic event despite the strong political connotation. Despite its reputation as the official periodical dedicated to the promotion of Futurist art, very few artists contributed to *Futurismo* particularly during the late period, with the exception of Dottori and Prampolini, whose articles and essays occasionally appeared in the issues. Around 1936 the periodical became a sort of monologue produced by Somenzi and the support showed to the Fascist regime reached an aggressive propagandistic level, leaving very little space for any discussion on aesthetics and art. This was particularly evident on the occasion of the visit to Italy by Adolf Hitler in 1938. Despite the fact the Hitler considered Futurism and all the other

⁵⁴ Marla Stone, "The State as Patron: Making Official Culture in Fascist Italy" in Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff eds. *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton-N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 210.

avant-garde movements as degenerate, and that Somenzi in the same periodical had defended Futurist art from the accusation of being degenerate, *Futurismo* described the visit with considerable enthusiasm.

If in *Futurismo* the contribution of the artists was very limited, the periodical *Stile Futurista* represented a lively platform of discussion about Futurist artistic theories. *Stile Futurista* represented a noteworthy contribution to the circulation of the ideas of Aeropittura. It was much more concentrated on artistic theories and, unlike *Futurismo*, many artists participated and contributed to the publications. Fillia, Prampolini, Dottori and Oriani were all involved in writing in the journal. The periodical was published between 1934 and 1935 and in this period it constituted a valid tool to disseminate Futurist contemporary artistic practices and themes with particular reference to architecture, *plastica murale* and *Naturismo* deploying a more critical and less political rhetorical approach than *Futurismo*. The art historian Enrico Crispolti deploys this periodical abundantly as a source of information. He describes the periodical by saying:

The position of the new Futurist periodical can appear very clear: defence of the Futurist avant-garde and tradition, art between the new futurist, cosmic and mechanical imagery and the non-figurative geometric or fantastic but also defence and circulation of the theories of the recent Rationalist movement. [...] What is a bit concerning is the new 'illustrationism' and the consequent temptation of praising the regime.⁵⁵

The figurative tendency of Futurism in particular in the later period seems to haunt art historians as a sort of inescapable visual proof of a political connivance. In the twentieth

⁵⁵ Enrico Crispolti, *Il secondo futurismo. 5 pittori + 1 scultore 1923-1938* (Turin: Ed. F.lli Pozzo, pref. 1961), p. 114. "Da queste indicazioni può apparire molto chiara la posizione del nuovo periodico futurista: difesa dell'avanguardia e della tradizione futurista, figuralmente fra le due polarità della nuova imagerie futurista cosmica e nuovamente meccanicistica, e il non figurativo geometrico o fantastico; difesa della tradizione architettonica e del lirismo ma anche difesa e divulgazione della recente corrente Razionalista [...]. L'elemento che desta preoccupazioni è proprio il nuovo illustrazionismo, con le conseguenti tentazioni di apologismo del regime".

century equating a figurative approach with a political totalitarian system has often represented an unfortunate but very widespread convention of interpretation.

In 1934 two Aeropittura exhibitions took place in Hamburg and Berlin before moving to Vienna at the Neue Gallerie in 1935. The Futurist poet Ruggero Vasari defended Aeropittura from the allegation of being a form of Bolshevik art by emphasising the strong connection of Futurist art with the 'Italian spirit' in his presentation speech at the exhibition opening.⁵⁶ According to Enzo Benedetto Vasari had also to respond to the article "Ripresa dell'arte di decadenza" by Robert Scholz who found the exhibition inappropriate and accused Aeropittura of being decadent and in clear contrast to the artistic renaissance proposed by the German dictator.⁵⁷ This is an interesting example of how the interpretation in reference to Aeropittura has shifted over time. In the early 1930s the artists attempted to legitimate their position within the Fascist regime but they were accused of Bolshevism. On the other hand, after the war, and for the following fifty years, they were completely ignored because of their shameful connections with the regime and accusation of collaborationism. The fight for survival that Berghaus mentions in his study is not limited at the Fascist period but it appears to have continued for several years.

Aeropainters were active until 1943 and the IV Quadrennial was the last exhibition in which Aeropittura appeared. From the end of the war until the 1950s, it was practically impossible to trace any mention of Aeropittura in scholarly publications and, as was mentioned above, many works were sold and moved abroad. A new wave of interest in Futurism surged at the end of the 1950s, which also included the late period. Aeropittura was still an underused terminology that was still too politically charged. Enrico Crispolti was one of the first art historians to research and publish on Futurism in the 1930s. As will be discussed in this

⁵⁶ He also published a book titled *Flug Malerei. Moderne Kunst und Reaktion* in which he defends Aeropittura and modern art from the accusation of being 'degenerate art.'

⁵⁷ Enzo Benedetto, *Futurismo centotrenta* (Rome: Arte-viva, 1975), p. 184.

thesis, while his interest was directed more towards a few artists and a limited geographical area, his work can be considered a valuable contribution towards the popularity of the movement, after more than ten years of silence.

Chapter 1 Futurism and Aeropittura (post-1945)

After the Second World War, the difficult process of reconstruction was aggravated by the burden of the tragic historical events in which the country was involved. Artists who had collaborated with the regime before the war found themselves involved in the enquiry carried out by the *commissione di epurazione* established in 1944 by the new administration. The supposed function of this new governmental body was to remove officers, civil servants, and employees in the public and military sector who had demonstrated a clear and proven association with the previous Fascist regime. The difficult legal position in which many people found themselves in was further exacerbated by a general climate of suspicion that surrounded everyone involved in these investigations. Although different studies have questioned the criteria according to which the commission operated, the work was supposed to be regulated.¹ To complicate the situation further, the government's instruction to the commission as to how to identify and purge society from any Fascist elements were constantly changing over the period of a few years. The *commissione di epurazione* and its influence on Italian society has been the subject of much research in recent years.² These studies have pointed out that the process of eradication of Fascist elements from Italian society was left unfinished and there are still doubts about the method and criteria of those operations. Historians agree that the general outcome can be considered a failure particularly in light of the fact that most of those who were actually involved with Fascism managed to 'transform' themselves, keep a low profile and maintain their positions and status in society.

¹ For example Romano Canosa in his book *Le sanzioni contro il Fascismo. Processi ed epurazioni a Milano negli anni 1945-47* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1978) at page 20 describes 4 different types of 'connections' with Fascism that the commissione di epurazione needed to identify in order to establish the guilt of a suspect.

² Giampaolo Pansa, *La grande bugia* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2006); Roy Palmer Domenico, *Processo ai Fascisti* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1996).

On the other hand, people only marginally involved in the regime, but also less protected by a powerful network, found themselves excluded from many elements of post-war society because of their alleged fascist associations. The historian Hans Woller provides a convincing explanation about why *epurazione* is often regarded as a peculiar, and to some extent unsuccessful, phenomenon:

The Fascists knew perfectly well that their time was over. They retired to private life and they tried not to be noticed. They never attempted – unlike Germans - to stop the course of the history. Their silent disappearance from the scene – without the violence and terror that usually follows the fall of a regime – was the main reason why in 1943 all the people who wanted something more than the simple liquidation of Fascism did not have many followers. [...] Many Italians simply did not want to take that direction. They were aware of the fact that they all compromised in some way with the regime especially in the years between 1929 and 1936, the ‘years of the consent’. To prove the degree of approval towards the regime it is sufficient to look at the very high number of subscriptions to the party (in 1939 around 3.400.000 out of a population of 45 million) and the weakness of the opposition.³

This quotation helps to clarify the complicated situation characterised by collaborationism and a conspiracy of silence that permeated Italian society, and which also impacted upon the life and work of artists. Their situations were often very problematic and this was clearly the case for the Futurists who had been active during the Fascist *ventennio*.

As archival material demonstrates, the artist Tullio Crali fought in order to maintain his position as a teacher despite the investigations carried out into his fascist links.⁴ In a letter sent

³ Woller, p. 9. “I Fascisti si resero pienamente conto che il loro tempo era finito. Si ritirarono a vita privata cercando di non dare nell’occhio e senza fare il benché minimo tentativo - a differenza della Germania - per cercare di arrestare il corso della storia. Questa silenziosa uscita di scena – senza alcuna violenza cioè e senza il terrore che solitamente accompagna e segue la caduta del regime – fu il primo motivo per cui nel 1943, non ebbero un grande seguito tutti quelli che avrebbero voluto qualcosa di più della pura e semplice liquidazione del vecchio regime. [...] Molti italiani semplicemente non se la sentivano di imboccare questa strada perché erano ben consci di essere scesi a patti in un modo o nell’altro con il regime, soprattutto negli anni del consenso tra il 1929 e il 1936 o di averlo perfino entusiasticamente appoggiato – del resto basta a provarlo non solo l’immenso numero di iscritti al partito (nel 1939 3.400.000 su una popolazione di 45 milioni) ma anche lo scarso seguito che ebbe allora l’opposizione antifascista.

⁴ Cra.2.225 (MART Archive).

to the enquiry commission he defended the independent origin of Aeropittura and claimed that Fascism made use of the ideology and aesthetic of the Aeropittura movement in order to propose an art dedicated to the present and progress. Another example is the architect Angiolo Mazzoni who was an active adherent of Futurism. In 1934 he co-wrote with Marinetti the manifesto of the *architettura aerea* and he later stopped his association with the movement for bureaucratic reasons.⁵ From 1919, the year of his graduation, and throughout the 1930s, he worked on several projects related to public buildings and the general renewal of architecture that was a crucial part of the Fascist political agenda. With the fall of Fascism, Mazzoni was under investigation by the commission for a period of few years. He collected and recorded all the material concerning the trials and some of his letters are instrumental in demonstrating the degree of precision and scrutiny that the commission showed in its investigation. During the trial, he was forced to justify and defend his work both from an ideological and technical point of view. For example he disputed that he created his architecture according to the 'Fascist artistic inclination', deploying the argument that in fact, so called 'Fascist architecture' never existed. He stated that every kind of architecture that was produced in the Fascist period was stigmatised as 'mussolinian architecture', even though they were very different in terms of architectural style. The architect Arnaldo Foschini was one of the witnesses at the trial and he recorded all the topics discussed during the interrogation, including those that were not part of the official documents. Foschini himself worked on architectural projects during the Fascist years such as the *Basilica Parrocchiale dei Santi Pietro e Paolo* for l'E42 in Rome, and became head of the faculty of architecture at the University in Rome in 1944. During the trial, Foschini had to provide professional opinions about the architectural planning and the choice of material used by Mazzoni in his buildings.

⁵ Enrico Crispolti ed. *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo*. exh. cat. Turin, c1980, p. 481. "Un rapporto che fu ufficialmente troncato per ordine burocratico, ed ebbe conseguenze sulla ulteriore partecipazione, anche se non incise sui rapporti d'amicizia fra Mazzoni e Marinetti".

The commission accused Mazzoni of squandering government funds for a very expensive but eventually useless *travertine* (type of marble) for the station in Rome. Foschini defended Mazzoni by saying that it was impossible to draw such a conclusion and he had to provide some very technical explanations about materials, structure, etc. The position of some artists was particularly uncertain and they either kept working anonymously or decided to change career direction. In 1972, when the first post-war exhibition featuring Aeropittura was organised, Franco Passoni, the curator of the exhibition, stated that many artists were accustomed to being ignored and they became very suspicious when someone showed an interest in their works.

The negative reception of Aeropittura after the war cannot be exclusively attributed to the action and policies implemented by the *commissione di epurazione*. To some extent the academic and scholarly community, by concentrating exclusively on the first development of Futurism, has unintentionally condemned the late works to artistic oblivion and aggravated the social anathema. This is clearly made evident in a brief overview of the artists who were included in the Biennials and Quadrennials that were held after the Second World War. Despite the claims of comprehensiveness in the presentation of what modern art had produced up to that year, there was no mention of Futurism in the Biennale in 1948. On the other hand the V Quadrennial held in Rome in the same year was the first to timidly include the Futurists in the exhibition. However, as Matteo D'Ambrosio explains in his text, the approach taken at this first Quadrennial set the trend for any future historical account of Futurism.⁶ The X room was allocated the Futurist retrospective and only included the artists who were active in the early period. The later works included were exhibited in the XV room next to artists who were not involved at all with Futurism. D'Ambrosio also reports a letter

⁶ Matteo D'Ambrosio, "Futuristi in retrospettiva" in Gino Agnese, Giovanna Bonasegale, Enrico Crispolti, eds. *I Futuristi e le Quadriennali* (Milan: Electa, 2009).

that Benedetta, Marinetti's wife, sent to an Italian newspaper to stress her disappointment with the organisers in relation to the location of the works. D'Ambrosio states: "This historical approach will cause a division of the institution with what it is still today imprudently defined as *secondo Futurismo*, dividing neatly the painting production of the years that preceded the Fascist regime from the development of the 1920s and 1930s".⁷

This attitude towards the art produced in this particular historical period continued for a long time and it survived even during a period in which there was supposed to be a renewed interest in Futurism. Between 1955 and 1956, the VII Quadrennial was organised in Rome with the aim "of presenting an anthological picture of Italian art of the last forty years."⁸ The exhibition was organised as following:

A contemporary section in which there will be exhibited paintings, sculptures, medals of active Italian artists. A retrospective section – in the Salon of 'Palazzo delle Esposizioni' – reserved for 1) a rigorous selection of very representative works produce in the period between 1910 and 1940, a sort of rich ideal museum of Italian contemporary art. 2) Few significant works by artists recently deceased to which is due to honour the memory.⁹

However, the only artist exhibited who was somehow connected to Aeropittura was Prampolini. Besides Prampolini, the other Futurists in the exhibition are Balla and Boccioni - representing a very restricted artistic panorama of the Futurist aesthetic.

⁷ Ibid., p.103.

⁸ 7. *Quadriennale Nazionale d'Arte di Roma*, November 1955 - April 1956 (Rome: De Luca, stampa 1955), p. 15. "...di offrire un quadro antologico dell'arte italiana di trenta quarantenni or sono".

⁹ Ibid., p. 15. "Una *sezione contemporanea*, nella quale saranno esposte pitture, sculture, medaglie, incisioni e monotipi di artisti viventi di nazionalità italiana. Una *sezione retrospettiva* unicamente destinata ad accogliere – nel salone d'onore de Palazzo delle Esposizioni – 1) una scelta rigorosa di opere altamente rappresentative della pittura e della scultura italiane realizzate nel periodo 1910-1940, quasi un numeratissimo museo ideale dell'arte Italiana contemporanea. 2) ad accogliere poche opere significative di artisti recentemente scomparsi, dei quali è doveroso onorare la memoria".

America and the Cold War

At the beginning of the 1950s, the resurgence of studies and research addressing the early developments of Futurism started and intensified until it reached a climax in the 1970s. Although, a discussion of the social and cultural changes that were taking place in the decades after the Second World War would have to include an extensive analysis of the economic and social factors, it is safe to state that the 1950s in Italy were characterised by a climate of stability and optimism for the future. The perception that Italy was destined to become a very strong economic power contributed to a general feeling of positivity and openness. Between the years 1953 and 1958 Italy saw an internal economic growth of 6.6% in GDP and 6.3% GDP growth between 1958 and 1961. Some years had passed since the tragic and shameful Fascist events creating a detached position from which it was possible to analyse and reflect on the period with less involvement. In general terms, and in contrast to a few years earlier, researching and studying the art and culture of the Fascist age no longer carried the same stigma as it did in the years immediately preceding the war, although, as will be explored further later, there are some exceptions to this trend.

The political situation at an international level may have contributed to this shift. In the 1950s Italy occupied a key position in the Cold War scheme not only due to its strategic geographical location but, more importantly, because a substantial part of the Italian parliament constituted the biggest organised communist party outside the Soviet Union.

Christopher Duggan in his study entitled *Italy in the Cold War* explains:

The flooding of Italy with American culture was motivated in large part by economic consideration, particularly by the desire to capture new markets. However both before and after 1945 and especially at the height of the Cold War in the late 1940s and early 1950s, political consideration may well have been more important. Because of its strong

communist party and its proximity to Yugoslavia, Italy was seen as being in the front line of the Cold War, a fact that helps explain the eagerness of the US government in promoting American culture in the peninsula.¹⁰

After 1943 the PBS (Psychological Warfare Branch) imported a large number of films depicting the benefit of life in the United States and around 7500 reels of film were shown in Italy - 120 in Rome alone.¹¹ The American Congress of Cultural Freedom, the organisation controlled by the CIA and responsible for carrying out cultural operations with the aim of mounting a campaign against Communism and the Soviet Union, tried to extend its influence to Italy. Some eminent Italian intellectuals were members of the American Congress and the similar Italian Association for Cultural Freedom founded in 1951, including the director of the Gallery of Modern Art in Rome.¹²

The study *Advertising America* explains that at the end of the war the USIS (United States Information Service) implemented a campaign addressing Italian mass audiences through the press and radio. However despite being a very expensive operation, the outcome did not seem to be very successful.¹³ The Italian people most likely to be reached by this form propaganda were the workers, who were close to the communist party and therefore constituted a very difficult target. The strategy changed and the USIS began targeting alternative groups, in particular the intellectual elite and the liberals who were both antifascist and anticommunist. The strategy was to spread American culture through cultural organizations and with this aim, and a significant budget at its disposal, the USIS organised exhibitions and concerts, established cultural centres and opened libraries. An exhibition of nineteenth-century

¹⁰ Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff, *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture and Society 1948-58* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), p. 13.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹² In 1957 a conference was organised in Milan by the American Congress of Cultural Freedom.

¹³ Simona Tobia, *Advertising America: the United States Information Service in Italy: 1945-1956* (Milan: LED, c2008).

American paintings was held in Rome and Milan between 1953 and 1954 and the tour of *Porgy and Bess* in Italian theatres in 1955 were also part of the programme.

The main theme of USIS produced material and broadcast in Italy was the idea of advertising the American model, and the American 'way of life' namely 'Advertising America'; their mission was to make the Italians feel they needed American welfare, wellbeing and wealth as linked to the model of democracy and freedom which ultimately depended on the 'Western choice' of the Italian people. This was because Italy, in addition to having the strongest communist party in Western Europe, was not a very resolute ally.¹⁴

In *Who Paid the Piper?* Frances Stonor Saunders confirms that Italy did not constitute an easy target:

When George Altman and Francois Bondy were despatched to Rome in late 1950 to engineer support for an Italian affiliate they were repeatedly asked "Who's paying for all this?" and 'by freedom' do you mean American capitalism?". Communist observers seemed to be present, they said, at most of their meetings and many Italian intellectuals were clearly susceptible to the 'totalitarian temptation'. Others, like Alberto Moravia, were reported to be more concerned about neofascism than communism. In their report to Josselson, Bondy and Altman stressed the provincialism and anti-Americanism of Italian intellectuals. There were 'great possibilities' for the congress in Italy but these would only mature as the result of slow, indirect, diversified and extremely discreet action.¹⁵

Despite the fact that, from both an economical and political point of view, Italy was in awe of America, Italian intellectuals were very suspicious and still divided between opposing pressures being applied by the Communist countries and this form of new American influence. As Saunders points out, because of the sinister legacy of some Fascistic residue, the scholars were vigilant and suspicious of new ideologies. Gina Ferrari in her article "Gli incredibili anni cinquanta" says that although the intellectuals were interested in what was

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵ Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999), p. 102.

happening in America, they were more motivated by the prospect of open internal debate both with America, which supported and promoted modernism, and with the USSR as the promoter of Communism and socialist realism.¹⁶ The ambiguity in which Italy lay in the 1950s is undeniable. There was the uncomfortable feeling of being surrounded by a considerable number of people who were holding key positions but had past connections with the regime and also did not seem to reflect any genuine communist and socialist principles at a time of a substantial economic development. As Duggan argues: "If the United States symbolised Italy's aspiration to wealth and modernity, the Soviet Union represented anti-fascism, democracy and social justice".¹⁷

The inundation of American art and culture in Italy was also achieved through new publications and exhibitions. As Duggan says, correspondents from *Artnews* and *Art in America* moved to Italy with the support of scholarships and awards. In the study entitled *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* Serge Guilbaut argues that while avant-garde art faced resistance and hostility in many countries during the war years the same works were later deployed as a form of propaganda to represent American freedom and individualism.¹⁸ The exhibition on Jackson Pollock organised by Peggy Guggenheim in Venice in 1950 is an example of an event that created a lively cultural debate. This event created astonishment in Italian artistic culture. Both Venturi and Longhi praised the exhibition. This is particularly interesting considering that both historians were not enthusiastic supporters of modern art. In this period Venturi seemed also to reassess his position in relation to Futurism. In a letter to Severini, Venturi reconsidered the past dispute with Marinetti by saying: "It is not true that I

¹⁶ Claudia Gian Ferrari, "Gli incredibili anni cinquanta" in *Annicinquanta: la nascita della creatività italiana*, (Firenze: ArtificioSkira, 2005), p. 419. "Gli intellettuali pur guardando a quel che avviene al di là dell'oceano, vengono viepiù stimolati ad un dibattito interno ma non di chiusura, piuttosto di confronto da una parte con l'America, sostenitrice e promotrice del modernismo dall'altra con l'URSS portavoce del comunismo e del realismo socialista".

¹⁷ Christopher Duncan, "Italy in the Cold War Years and the Legacy of Fascism" in *Italy in the Cold War*, p. 17.

¹⁸ Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, c1984).

detest Futurism, I used to hate it, it is true, but it is over now. If you remember when I met you at the latest Biennale I frankly expressed my admiration for what you exhibited during your Futurist period”.¹⁹

The cultural and artistic exchanges between America and Italy became stronger after the Second World War and intensified over time. The exhibition *Twentieth-Century Italian Art*, curated by Alfred H. Barr, was inaugurated in New York in 1949 and acclaimed by some Italian scholars who praised the courageous choice of the artists.²⁰ Ferrari reports Venturi’s comments on the exhibition: “the Italian painters had the courage to express their own sentiments and passions with forms and colours instead of imitating nature. They have not paid attention to the shocked moralist who accused them of opening hell’s doors!”²¹ Futurist art was included in these events. In 1954 an exhibition of five Futurist painters was organised by Sidney Janis in New York whilst that the same year, an exhibition that included works by Balla and Severini was held at the Rose Fried Gallery.²²

The representation of Italy and Italian works in America was not limited to painting or sculpture. In her essay, Penny Sparke considers the exhibition *Italy at Work* which toured the United States in the early 1950s as an important example of the sort of cultural exchanges occurring between Italy and America during the period. The catalogue describes the objects exhibited as “the vigorous flowering of an early spring, an upsurge of Italian vitality that seems to have stored itself up during the long grey Fascist interim, waiting for the day of sun

¹⁹ Sev. I. 2. 114.2 (MART Archive) Letter by Lionello Venturi, 12 Gennaio 1952. “Non credere che io detesti il Futurismo; l’ho detestato, è vero, ma è acqua passata; e se ricordi quando ci incontrammo a Venezia all’ultima Biennale ti espressi francamente la mia ammirazione per ciò che avevi esposto nel periodo Futurista”.

²⁰ James Thrall Soby and Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Twentieth Century Italian Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949).

²¹ Ferrari, “Gli incredibili anni cinquanta”, p. 7. “Senza prestare attenzione agli scandalizzati moralisti che gli accusano di aprire le porte dell’inferno o ai commissari moscoviti che hanno tentato di confinarli entri i limiti di un rigido realismo, i pittori italiani della nuova generazione hanno avuto il coraggio di esprimere i propri sentimenti e le proprie passioni con forme e colori e linee anziché imitare la natura”.

²² Rosa Trillo Clough, *Futurism. The Story of a Modern Art Movement. A New Appraisal* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1961), p. 238.

again”.²³ It appears that Italy needed help from America to rejuvenate and demonstrate to the world its new positive energy, stimulated by the revitalising American culture and freedom. The catalogue of the exhibition shows the participation of Paul Hyde Bonner, special assistant to the chief ECA (Economic Cooperation Administration) mission to Italy, which had the unofficial but widely known aim to restrain Soviet influence in the country. The aim of the exhibition was also to make the people aware of the craft and industry of Italian production, that are “not only within the reach of the average buying public but will also be available”.²⁴ The catalogue continues: “To this end the American public must be informed of the opportunities afforded by this movement for the enrichment of their lives in a field which supplements rather than competes with their own production.” In a sense this event seems to fulfil the Italian stereotype, representing and constructing the Italian folklore that the Americans were imagining.

Duggan also states that there was a revival of the “inter-war Rationalist movement, which had started in Italy in the 1920s inspired by the work of Le Corbusier in France and the Bauhaus school in Germany”.²⁵ In this period, Rationalist architecture was often depicted as antifascist architecture as opposed to the ideology of the architects Marcello Piacentini and Novecento. In her discussion of the role of the Rationalists within the Fascist agenda for architecture, Diane Yvonne Ghirardo says:

The Italian scholars who discuss these architects reveal a profound discomfort in their interpretations of an architecture that is as modern as it is Fascist. Over the years, they have attempted to explain away the Fascism of Rationalist architects in Italy. The earliest argument was that

²³ Penny Sparke, “Industrial Design or Industrial Aesthetic?: American Influence on the Emergence of the Italian Modern Design Movement, 1948-58” in *Italy in the Cold War*, p. 159. First published in W.D. Teague ed. *Italy at Work*. exh. cat. New York, 1951.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

the architects 'played Fascist in order to do architecture' as Veronesi held to be the case for Giuseppe Pagano.²⁶

In the 1950s, Rationalist architecture took on the role of anti-Fascist art and it became a convenient tool to believe that a form of antifascism in art and architecture actually existed. The architect Bruno Zevi argued despite the innocent intentions and apolitical nature of the Rationalists, they could not resist the power of the regime and even they were eventually corrupted.²⁷ More recently, scholars such as Cesare De Seta and Giorgio Ciucci have attempted to engage in a more grounded and objective analysis of Rationalist architecture proposing a distinction between the political convictions of the architects and their artistic goals.²⁸ The link between late Futurism and Rationalist architecture in the 1930s was very strong. Although the Rationalists proved to be reluctant in collaborating with the Futurists, Fillia included extensive analysis of Rationalist architecture, together with Le Corbusier's and other modernist writings, as key contributions in his book *La nuova architettura* and in *La Città Nuova*, the periodical on architecture that he directed between 1930 and 1934. Le Corbusier had regular contacts with some of the Italian Rationalists involved in the publication of the magazine *Valori plastici*. In 1934, he visited Italy on Mussolini's invitation with the ultimate ambition to be involved in some projects for new towns that the regime was planning to build. Although the collaboration was never finalised, Le Corbusier's visit was an opportunity to promote cultural exchanges and reinforce professional networks. From this respect, the connection with Rationalism may have helped Futurism to gain some form of visibility in a period in which scholars were rediscovering modernism.

²⁶ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist's Role in Regime Building", *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 39, n. 2, May 1980, p. 109.

²⁷ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Architects, Exhibitions, and the Politics of Culture in Fascist Italy", *The Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 45, n. 2, February 1992, pp. 67-75.

²⁸ Cesare De Seta, *Architetti italiani del novecento* (Bari: Laterza, 1982); Cesare De Seta ed. *Architettura e città durante il Fascismo* (Bari: Laterza, 1976); Giorgio Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il Fascismo: architettura e città, 1922-1944* (Turin: Einaudi, c1989).

As previously mentioned, the inundation of American culture in Italy was favourably perceived by many Italian scholars in the 1950s. However, even before, in the 1930s it is possible to find some enthusiastic supporters of American culture. Giovanna Bonsegale reports Pavese's account of the period:

Around 1930 when Fascism started being a hope for the world, some young people discovered in Kafka's books a type of America thoughtful, barbaric, happy, quarrelsome, dissolute, and fertile. [...] At this point American culture became for us something very serious, a sort of big laboratory [...] American culture gave us the opportunity to see the carrying out of our own drama as on a big screen.²⁹

Bonsegale adds:

The American myth in the 1930s can be compared with the European dream for the American and the Aeropainters were particular focused on the interlaces between the two cultures. Pannaggi stayed for a period in the States for the first time in 1926 and he exhibited his works few times as well as Prampolini and Depero who did some mural decoration between 1920s and 1930s.³⁰

In addition to the general effort of promoting American culture in the 1950s, it may also have seemed convenient to try to boost the popularity of a movement, in this case Aeropittura, that twenty years earlier was so active in manifesting its support for American culture. Even the early Fascist government attempted to develop a positive relationship with America mainly on the grounds of the possible economic benefits. Mussolini was taking advantage of the loans flooding out of America in a period when, despite the victory in the First World War, the

²⁹ Giovanna Bonsegale, "L'estetica del volo tra Futurismo e Aeropittura" in Anna Maria Andreoli and Giovanni Caprara eds. *Volare! Futurismo, aviomania, tecnica e cultura italiana del volo, 1903-1940* (Rome: De Luca, 2003), p. 174. "Verso il 1930, quando il fascismo cominciava a essere 'la speranza del mondo' accadde ad alcuni giovani di scoprire nei suoi [Kafka] libri l'America, una America pensosa e barbarica, felice e rissosa, dissoluta, feconda, [...] A questo punto la cultura Americana divenne per noi qualcosa di molto serio e prezioso, divenne una sorta di grande laboratorio. [...] La cultura americana ci promise in quegli anni di vedere svolgersi come uno schermo gigante il nostro stesso dramma".

³⁰ Ibid., p. 174. "Il mito Americano assume quindi nell'Italia degli anni Trenta una valenza non dissimile da quella del sogno europeo degli americani e all'intreccio delle due culture sono particolarmente attenti alcuni degli artisti aeropittori. Pannaggi soggiorna negli Stati Uniti per la prima volta nel 1926 e vi espone più volte, così come Prampolini e Depero che vi esguiranno, negli anni tra Venti e Trenta, anche decorazioni murali".

Italian finances were in a disastrous state. Across the ocean, the American administration perceived Mussolini's government as a positive control over any communist influences and this continued even after the murder of the political opponent Giacomo Matteotti.³¹

Despite the strong impulse towards modern art and its many supporters, the debate in Italy surrounding some of the exhibitions featuring modern art was very animated. As Ferrari reports in her article, Palmiro Togliatti, the founder of the Communist party in Italy, was particularly critical of an exhibition of modern art that took place in Bologna. He described the works as "over-conceived, cold, inexpressive and full of 'over-academic' extravagances".³² By looking at the catalogue, it seems very difficult to recognise in this description the delicate and intimate atmosphere of some paintings by Ennio Morlotti or Renato Guttuso, who seemed still undecided between a figurative or abstract style.

In the case of Futurism, the climate of suspicion was still very much alive and directed most vigorously towards the 1930s production. As Crispolti extensively analysed in his works, most of the exhibitions and publications on the subject tended to exclude that period of Futurism all together. In terms of chronology, early research and studies have not considered Aeropittura as an official or valid part of Futurism. It was commonly believed that Futurism was over after the First World War. In 1960, Crispolti was hoping that both the exhibition in New York at the MoMA in 1961 and the Biennale could include 'the second wave' of Futurism. According to Crispolti, those events would have been an occasion to give further impetus to research in the area.³³ Unfortunately, the exhibition stated that Futurism was over in 1918. An article in Severini's archival collection about an exhibition at the Fried Gallery in America entitled *The Future that Ended in 1915* says:

³¹ Simona Urso, *Margherita Sarfatti: dal mito del Dux al mito americano* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2003).

³² Ferrari, p. 9. "...studiate, fredde, inespresse e ultraccademiche stravaganze".

³³ Enrico Crispolti, Elio Benoldi, Luciano Pistoni, "Il secondo Futurismo" in *Notizie*, III, n°10, January 1960, p. 11.

By 1918 Futurism was finished, as were the main reasons which had produced this marvellous renaissance. Severini, in Paris, turned to the Neo-classic counter-reformation, under the influence of Picasso's Italian journey. Boccioni was killed in the war. Balla, isolated in Rome, without any support or collective enthusiasm, began applying the Futurist forms to the objects of his house and to stage sets, in a very peculiar style of applied art. Then, feeling the pressure of his family, lacking the support which Marinetti had constantly provided to the artist, closed himself in a sort of conventional style, trying to rebuild the pre-Futurist economic and artistic reputation.³⁴

This conventional interpretation of Futurism also influenced the professional and personal life of the artists. The exemplary case is the architect Angiolo Mazzoni who has been mentioned in relation to his experience with the *commissione di epurazione*. However his misadventures were not limited to that particular period. In 1958, after his trial and subsequent move to South America, Mazzoni started a regular correspondence with Bruno Zevi, one the most popular architects in Italy at the time. In this correspondence Mazzoni attempts to narrate his life and his work both during and after Fascism. Zevi thought it was necessary to collect as much information as possible in order to illuminate that period for further generations.

I sincerely thank you. I will keep this material in the archive [..] anything that can clarify the obscure cultural period of Fascism is useful for the young generation and also for everyone who believed in it. In this country no one ever pays and you are one of the few exceptions. However everyone pays in moral terms for the nauseating conspiracy of silence.³⁵

³⁴ Sev.GSF VII.9 1954 (MART Archive).

³⁵ Volume 15D, 30 June 1958, Mazzoni collection (MART Archive), p. 2. "La ringrazio vivamente. Conserverò questo materiale negli archivi...tutto ciò che può far luce sull'oscuro periodo culturale del fascismo è utile ai giovani a tutti anche a chi ci ha creduto. Né io sinceramente posso distinguere tra ciò che voleva il padrone e ciò che volevano i servi; poiché i servi ci sono quando c'è il padrone, ed è tipico delle dittature l'autommiserimento e il suicidio. In questo paese apparentemente nessuno paga e lei costituisce una delle poche eccezioni. Ma in realtà tutti paghiamo in termini morali per le nauseanti omertà".

Mazzoni explains the mixed feelings he experienced after the fall of the regime and the fact that he carried the burden of his own actions without denouncing or involving other people. He describes his connections with both the Fascists and with the antifascists and how, on different occasions, he helped and supported both factions. In 1938 Mussolini officially accused Mazzoni of 'antifascist feelings' and noted the fact that some members of Mazzoni's family were not enrolled in the Fascist party. Some minor figures testified against him in order to obtain commissions in new projects of which Mazzoni was in charge. In order to avoid a trial, Mazzoni assigned the commissions to those artists and for this reason was accused of corruption after the fall of Fascism. Like many other artists Mazzoni underwent a very difficult time: "I feel an atmosphere of distrust, angst and fear around my case".³⁶ According to Mazzoni, some people with very strong connections to the Fascist regime were still part of the government in the 1950s. He says that the very few times when he asked for help they ignored him, possibly fearing negative consequences. Moreover, he was in the miserable situation of seeing his architecture being restored in order to erase any sign of association with Fascism. He states: "the Fascists never considered me neither one of them nor part of their inner circle. I never had any protection during and after Fascism".³⁷ The correspondence goes on for several years but what Zevi was looking for was a detached account of the period that could lead to a more general project about the architecture of the Fascist era. The material produced by Mazzoni did not satisfy Zevi because it did not provide the detached account that the architect was looking for and it could not be considered more than a biographical narrative. Zevi asked Mazzoni to complete the report and keep it ready for the future but he said that he did not believe it was the right moment to publish a critical account of Mazzoni's contribution to modern Italian architecture. The account provided by

³⁶ Volume 15D, (MART Archive). "...sento un'atmosfera di angustia e timore intorno a me".

³⁷ Ibid., "I Fascisti non mi hanno mai considerato uno dei loro, né considerato nella loro cerchia. Per questo non ebbi mai protezioni Fasciste durante il regime, né essi mi aiutarono dopo contro i soprusi di cui ero vittima".

Mazzoni in his letters was clearly his own story of the events and because of the ambiguity of the period, an objective and detached historical account was probably extremely difficult to achieve, especially when the social and historical events were so intimately linked with personal experience. However, it does provide an interesting case study that demonstrates the difficulties that the artists involved with Futurism faced not only during the Fascist period but in particular in the following decades. Other artists, such as Prampolini, were eager to finally receive some kind of recognition. In 1956, Prampolini sent a letter to Severini to ask him to be part of the commission panel in the upcoming Quadrennial. His point is very clearly expressed: “You have to be there [...] I would like you to illustrate and promote my works to the unwitting members of the panel in order, in my sixties, to have recognition at last. You are the only one who can understand me”.³⁸

However, it is clear that the first development of Futurism attracted increasing levels of attention over time and the interest was stimulated by some influential studies published during the period. The interest of the scholars was directed to both single artists, like Giulio Argan’s monograph on the artist Umberto Boccioni published in 1953, but also to the movement in general.³⁹ The collection of documents, manifestos and artists’ writings included in the two volume publication *Archivi del Futurismo* is still today an indispensable tool for researcher and historians of Futurism.⁴⁰ As the first systematic and precise study on Futurism, the *Archivi* gave a new boost to the studies of Marinetti’s movement. The publication however limits the analysis to material only up until 1920 in effect ignoring more than 20 years of the movement. To amend this omission, Crispolti is currently editing *Nuovi*

³⁸ Sev. I. 2. 83.3, Rome 1956 (MART Archive). “Tu devi essere presente e dirigere la cosa così bene, come sai fare. [...] Io vorrei che la mia opera consequenziale in un ordine plastico, fosse da te illustrata agli ignari della commissione e sostenuta validamente perché infine a sessant’anni abbia una volta un riconoscimento. Tu solo puoi comprendermi”.

³⁹ Giulio Carlo Argan, *Umberto Boccioni* (Rome: De Luca, 1953).

⁴⁰ Maria Drudi Gambillo e Teresa Fiori eds. *Archivi del Futurismo* (Rome: De Luca, 1958).

Archivi del Futurismo a revised, enriched and chronologically organized document that will constitute an extended version of the first publication. It is due to appear in 2010.

Futurism was also a source of inspiration for artists working in the period and often the same art historians who engaged in an investigation of the Futurist movement were also interested in the work of artists such as Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri and Enrico Baj. Fontana published his *Manifesto Blanco* in 1946 and the *Manifesto dello Spazialismo* two years later. Ferrari says that Fontana was “the artist who particularly stimulated new ideas and forms. Yet he is the artist who is deeply rooted in the lesson of Futurism. He acknowledges that movement for his revolutionary role in the theoretical and “plastic” definition of the dynamic space”.⁴¹ Scholars such as Crispolti and Maurizio Carrieri who were considered the main experts on Futurism in the period, also wrote extensively about Fontana and Baj, the founder of *Nuclear Art*. Baj particularly engaged with the new scientific discoveries and, in particular, the new space revealed by the nuclear world.

Surprisingly, in this context of renewed interest in Futurism and its manifestation, a very early examination of Aeropittura was made by Riccardo Averini in 1953 in an aviation magazine.⁴² The two main aspects that are significantly important within a discussion of the reception of Aeropittura are the early date of this publication, and the fact that the author concentrates his attention on an examination of Aeropittura specifically rather than on a general discussion on the second development of Futurism. In this sense this article significantly predates some of the studies on Aeropittura that were to be published around the 1970s and after. Averini introduces his argument by underlining the many misconceptions and prejudices towards Futurism and how these were undergoing a revision. The need to

⁴¹ Ferrari, p. 5. “....l’artista che maggiormente coagula e stimola nuove idee e nuove forme e che va considerato un caposcuola geniale ed intuitivo. Ma è anche l’artista che affonda le proprie radici nella lezione Futurista, riconoscendo a quel movimento (che negli anni cinquanta veniva reietto in quanto considerato una delle matrici del fascismo) il vero ruolo rivoluzionario della definizione teorica e plastica dello spazio dinamico”.

⁴² Cra.3.478, Tullio Crali collection, (MART Archive). Riccardo Averini, “L’Aeropittura Futurista in Italia” in *Ciampino*, July 1953, pp. 12-21.

justify or apologise for many years of silence and misunderstandings of the movement is a constant preamble in any study of Aeropittura and the late development of Futurism. Unsurprisingly, he links Aeropittura with the success of aviation in Italy and in particular with the aeronautical enterprises of the pilot and later politician Italo Balbo. Balla is one of the artists that Averini considers a key figure in the development of Aeropittura. Moreover, he mentions artists such as Alfredo Ambrosi, Tullio Crali, Angelo Caviglioni, Tato and Benedetta who, despite the fact they played a significant role in Aeropittura, had never been extensively examined before. By considering the word Aeropittura itself as a very important designation of Futurism in 1930s, Averini also introduces a problem of terminology. Because of the brevity of the article, he admits that he cannot analyse Aeropittura exhaustively but he hopes that further studies or exhibitions may increase knowledge about this area. It is noteworthy that this was probably the first publication after the war that recognised the importance of Aeropittura, in comparison to the idea of Futurism in general. The next specific text about Aeropittura did not appear until 1970 as it will be explained in the next paragraphs.

Enrico Crispolti and the second Futurism

Between 1958 and 1968, Enrico Crispolti dominated the scene in terms of research and publications on post First World War Futurism. In 1958 in a essay entitled “Alcuni appunti sul secondo Futurismo tra le due guerre” and in a later article published in the periodical *Notizie* in 1960, Crispolti introduced the term *secondo Futurismo* to identify the artistic Futurist production that developed after the First World War and in particular from the 1920s onwards.⁴³ Although the authorship of the definition of *secondo Futurismo* has been

⁴³ Enrico Crispolti, “Alcuni appunti sul secondo Futurismo tra le due guerre”, *Notizie: arti figurative*, Turin, April 1958, pp. 34-48; Enrico Crispolti, Elio Benoldi, Luciano Pistoni “Il secondo Futurismo” in *Notizie*, III, n°10, January 1960.

commonly attributed to Crispolti, according to Guido Bartorelli, it was originally drawn from *Pittori italiani dal Futurismo ad oggi* published by Guido Ballo in 1956 and then deployed by Crispolti in 1958.⁴⁴ In his first articles Crispolti analysed the nature of the reception and studies of the period describing the ‘inferiority complex’ of late Futurism in comparison to its earlier manifestation and the absence of study in this area.

The effort of rediscovery and revaluation of the second Futurist generation is more and more intense. This generation of artists was active from the end of the First World War and the dramatic years that precede the Second World War. It is a forgotten page of our contemporary artistic history but for many reasons is crucial.⁴⁵

In his work, he does not propose the idea of a Futurism enclosed within the Italian panorama but rather suggests the idea of a movement open, and in dialogue with, European culture, even in the later period. By emphasising the artistic exchanges with the European panorama, Crispolti asserts the international nature of the movement even in the late period and in a sense he downplays the sense of a strong Italian identity inherent in the ideology – a claim repeatedly made by the artists and which reinforced the profoundly controversial links between the Futurist movement and the political agenda. More importantly, drawing parallels with the well regarded and politically correct international art scene helped to legitimize the late Futurist aesthetic using an historical account rather than by using an analysis of the artists’ body of work. In these articles, Crispolti compares the so called ‘second Futurism’ with other artistic movements active in Italy at that time. He underlines the differences in style among second Futurism itself and then he identifies Turin as the area where the movement was most prolific, with particular reference to the artists Prampolini and Fillia. It

⁴⁴ Guido Ballo, *Pittori italiani dal Futurismo ad oggi* (Ed. Mediterranee, stampa 1956).

⁴⁵ Crispolti, “Il secondo Futurismo”, p. 5. “Lo sforzo di scoperta e rivalutazione della seconda generazione Futurista, operante cioè fra la fine del primo conflitto mondiale e gli anni, intensamente drammatici e ricchi di presagi che precedettero il secondo Futurismo va facendosi sempre più intenso. È una pagina dimenticata della nostra storia artistica contemporanea, ma per molte ragioni una pagina chiave”.

can be speculated that the main reason for granting this particular status to the Turin group was their attempt to keep contacts with the European avant-garde. Fillia went to Paris on various occasions and at least until mid-1930 the Futurist artists were very much in contact with groups such as Abstraction-Création and De Stijl. Even in the later 1930s when the exchanges proved to be more difficult due to the political situation, the Futurists were still very much aware of contemporary European artistic production.

Crispoliti also pays attention to the new form of 'historicity' represented by the second Futurism and the different context in which it developed in comparison with the first Futurism. In order to show the credentials of late Futurism, it was not only necessary to stress the correspondences and continuities with the first period, but probably more importantly, the innovations and developments that occurred in the late period allowing the artists to present their works as a valid proposition and not a mere repetition of previous visual sources. Despite recognising continuity, the analysis also included a description of the demarcation between the two chronologically different periods of Futurism, something that Crispolti himself has reconsidered in more recent studies. Moreover, the artists' opinion in relation to the developments and changes that occurred during the entire Futurist trajectory could not be ignored. Fillia is unequivocal in his description of the differences between the first and the second Futurism:

The difference between the first Futurists and us is, of course, enormous: they were, as they defined themselves, the primitives of a new sensibility with defined law of order and equilibrium. As a consequence: logic development of plastic problems, deeper analysis and abandonment of several directions of research, overcoming the poetic and rhetorical moment. The last twenty years of work have created in the young Futurist generation a conscience in accordance with its own time – the triumph of the Futurist principles has

diminished the need of that polemic rigorousness that was necessary in the hostile environment before the First World War.⁴⁶

Crispoliti talks about the history of second Futurism in terms of adherence to the idea of a new civilization shaped around the machine. This mechanical utopia can be inscribed within a form of idealism that developed in the 1930s and can be considered a consequence of the crisis of the pragmatism of the first Futurist movement. The term Aeropittura is hardly mentioned in this article. According to Crispolti the death of Fillia in 1936, at the age of 32, marked the beginning of the decline of the second Futurism and he describes the work of artists such as Dottori, Benedetta and Tato as far from convincing. Thus, in the very first articles about Futurism in the 1930s Aeropittura was not really examined as a serious artistic proposition. There is a general sense in which Aeropittura represents a complacent, and to some extent redundant, artistic movement that involved very few artists and only lasted a short period of time before degenerating into pathetic figurative reproductions of the tools of warfare. At a time in which the intention was to present second Futurism in a new positive light, paying too much attention to Aeropittura could have been a serious challenge to the entire project. Therefore, Crispolti does not provide an extensive analysis of Aeropittura and establishes the parameters in reference to the nature and the aspects or works that need to be included under the umbrella of second Futurism.

Chronologically the beginning of second Futurism is identified with the end of the First World War in 1918 and, according to Crispolti's argument, it can be considered to have

⁴⁶ Fillia, "Il paesaggio nella pittura Futurista" *Oggi e Domani*, I, n.18, 18 August 1930, p. 5. "Naturalmente tra i primi Futuristi e noi la differenza è enorme: mentre quelli per loro stessa definizione erano i primitivi di una nuova sensibilità con leggi d'ordine e d'equilibrio ben definite. In conseguenza: sviluppo logico dei problemi plastici, approfondimento o abbandono delle diverse ricerche, superamento dell'attimo polemico e teorico. Questi vent'anni di lavoro hanno creato nelle generazioni di giovani una coscienza in armonia col proprio tempo – il trionfo dei principi Futuristi ha attenuato il bisogno di quell'intransigenza polemica che era necessaria nell'ambiente ostile dell'anteguerra. Ecco perciò noi ci avviciniamo oggi all'arte con uno specifico clima modificato non più ossessionati dall'ansia inventiva ma ricchi già di una nostra tradizione, libero dal peso del passato".

ended at the end of the 1930s. After that period the coherence of the movement is considered to be lost and only some artists with particular attention to Prampolini appear to deserve attention. If the chronological trajectory described by Crispolti is extended, the geographical area is concentrated around the Turin group. As mentioned above, the general impression is that the attempt to differentiate first from second Futurism is achieved by stressing the associations of second Futurism with the contemporary European avant-garde. The range of aesthetics that Crispolti associates with second Futurism varies from Dada, Metaphysical painting and Surrealism to Constructivism, Abstraction-Creation and Rationalism, despite the fact that the majority of these groups were dismissed by the Futurist artists as not in tune with Futurist goals.

A claim which is consistent throughout all the early publications of Crispolti is the need for further research in the area. Crispolti places great expectations on the exhibition in New York in 1960 which is seen as a brilliant occasion for pursuing further studies regarding second Futurism. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, his expectations were not fulfilled and the exhibition only included works up to 1918. However he welcomed the publication of *Archivi del Futurismo* as a key contribution in the field and pleaded for a similar study that would be chronologically extended to include second Futurism.⁴⁷ The path for acceptance proved to be hard for second Futurism and the publication will only finally appear around fifty years after Crispolti's original plea.

Within the broad category of second Futurism, Crispolti distinguishes different moments based on a classification of the works according to themes. The start of the first period is identified between the years 1918 and 1920 with the end established in 1927-28. The representation is characterised by formal mechanical objects or landscapes with geometric connotations described in the works by Prampolini, Paladini, Pannaggi and Mino Rosso. The

⁴⁷ Maria Drudi Gambillo and Teresa Fiori eds. *Archivi del Futurismo* (Rome: De Luca, 1958).

second phase starts in 1927-28 and runs until 1938. However the only artistic production that seems to be worth mentioning after 1936 is by Prampolini with no extensive examination of works by other artists. The distinctive components of this period are the development of Aeropittura and the 'cosmic idealism', a definition coined by Prampolini, in which, according to Crispolti, the metaphysical painting was a major influence.⁴⁸ The cosmic idealism embodied in particular in the works of Fillia and Prampolini is referred to as the representation of a 'geological utopia', a world of organic and mechanical forces. The difficulties in deploying the term Aeropittura to define an entire art production starting from 1929 is clearly represented by the heterogeneous nature of its production over a long period of time. Crispolti's identification of cosmic idealism as a category is shared by other scholars and this definition is still used today to describe the works that demonstrate a comparable style and artistic language. For example, the works produced by Fillia and Prampolini are evidently dissimilar from the work by Tato and Ambrosi. However, considering the importance attributed by the artists to the word 'Aeropittura' itself and the publication of the manifesto as a key moment for second Futurism, it seems striking that Aeropittura is downplayed in favour of cosmic idealism, and the publication of the Manifesto is not even taken to mark the beginning of the second part of second Futurism.

In 1961 Crispolti published his first monograph specifically on second Futurism entitled *Il secondo Futurismo: Torino 1923-1938*.⁴⁹ In this book, he provides an extensive study of second Futurism but he narrows his field of investigation to five painters and one sculptor centred around the geographical area of Turin in the 1930s. Therefore, the definition of *secondo Futurismo* proposed by Crispolti in this text is limited to a particular geographical area and to six artists specifically. His analysis begins with the claim of a lack of material in

⁴⁸ Crispolti, "Il secondo Futurismo", p. 8.

⁴⁹ Enrico Crispolti, *Il secondo Futurismo: Torino 1923-1938* (Turin: Ed. F.lli Pozzo, 1961).

this field and provides the historiography and the primary sources deployed in his discussion. As Crispolti reports, there is no mention of second Futurism in previous studies such as *La pittura contemporanea* (1947) by Venturi, *Pittura moderna italiana* (1946) by Giuseppe Marchiori, *Pittura moderna italiana: idea per una storia* (1950) by Umberto Apollonio and the exhibition catalogue *Twentieth-Century Italian Art* in 1949. The first two publications in which second Futurism was included are identified with “Un Demi-siècle d'Art Italien” published by Christian Zervos in *Cahiers d'Art* and Raffaele Carrieri in *Pittura e scultura d'avanguardia in Italia 1890-1950*.⁵⁰

Christian Zervos, the founder of the periodical *Cahiers d'Art*, showed a particular interest in contemporary American art. He collaborated with American dealers like Samuel Koontz who tried to promote American art in Europe and, after being unsuccessful in trying to collaborate with the director of Musée d'art Moderne in Paris, the American dealer convinced Zervos to discuss and provide a critical account of some American artists on the pages of his periodical. According to Crispolti, Zervos mistakenly focused his work excessively on Aeropittura and the particular stress on the works by Dottori, Crali and Tato is considered by Crispolti as showing a lack of focus on the part of the French scholar. The issue of *Cahiers d'Art* in which second Futurism is mentioned is almost completely dedicated to Italian art and the very brief chapter about the late development of Futurism is appropriately entitled “La seconde génération Futurist”.⁵¹ Crispolti notices that all the images included in the chapter to illustrate the works of the second Futurist generation are by Dottori, Crali and Tato. As do many other scholars before and after, Zervos hopes for a further and complete analysis of the artists. On the other hand Carrieri based his analysis ‘more correctly’, according to Crispolti, on Prampolini and Depero. Carrieri’s interest encompasses the entire Futurist period and in

⁵⁰ Raffaele Carrieri, *Pittura, scultura d'avanguardia 1890-1960 in Italia* (Milan: Edizioni della Conchiglia, 1960).

⁵¹ Christian Zervos, ‘Un Demi-siècle d'Art Italien’, *Cahiers d'Art*, 25e année I. 1950, p. 109.

1961 he published an important study dedicated to the movement.⁵² Interestingly, Carrieri's research interest also included the work of the artist Lucio Fontana and the *Informale* in Italy. A catalogue of a later exhibition reports Carrieri's ideas about Fontana and his lunar landscape:

The spatial environment created by Fontana brought us close to the moon more and better than any telescope. That he looked at the sky for inspiration is clear from his ceramics that are energetic forms in development in space. In works such as the *Spatial Ceramic* (1949) we can recognise the language of an universe enclosed in small spaces as a premonition of inform matter that vibrates in the mystery of cosmos. Another example is the terracotta plate in which the wire draws orbit of gravitation on the concave surface of the object that is decorated with pronounced marks and rich of expressive freedom.⁵³

The association between aerial space, matter and the work of Lucio Fontana was to become a recurrent theme in any discourse on Futurist legacy, although the reference is made mainly in reference to the work of Prampolini. The *Spazialismo* by Fontana also appeared in 1961 in the publication *Futurism. The Story of a Modern Art Movement. A New Appraisal* by Rosa Trillo Clough. In the second part of the book entitled "A New Appraisal of Futurism" Trillo Clough provides an overview of some contemporary receptions of Futurism including a description of an analysis by the artist Piero Dorazio on what constitutes the essence of contemporary art and how this could relate to Futurism:

Science and formal conceptions of art today have as a common heritage the principles of scientific thought and art of the Renaissance which the minds of the nineteenth century developed to the limit, brought to a conclusion and directed towards the intuition of a completely new

⁵² Raffaele Carrieri, *Il Futurismo* (Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1961).

⁵³ *Volare!*, p. 277. "L'ambiente spaziale creato da Fontana in via Manzoni a Milano ci ha avvicinato alla luna assai più e meglio di qualsiasi cannocchiale. Che Fontana abbia guardato il cielo e non solo quello delle nuvole argentine lo rivelavano già le sue ceramiche trepidanti forme in divenire nello spazio. Come non riconoscere il linguaggio di un universo racchiuso in piccoli spazi nella Ceramica Spaziale del 1949 in gesso nero, presagio di materia informe che vibra nel mistero dl cosmo o nel piatto di terracotta del 1951 dove il filo di ferro traccia delle orbite di gravitazione sulla superficie leggermente convessa dell'oggetto, decorata con segni decisi e ricchi di libertà espressiva".

consciousness of and vision of reality. [...] Form and space, movement, light and colour became the fundamental themes of painting in the years that followed. The young artists go beyond visibility no more and no less than the young scientists see and face reality beyond experimental evidence. This is the direction taken by two revolutionary tendencies of the twentieth century in the plastics art: Cubism and Futurism.⁵⁴

A substantial part of this chapter is also devoted to an analysis of *Spazialismo* and Nuclear Art and their aesthetic as a development of the Futurist's theories. In the first part of the book, the chapter entitled "Futurism after the Second World War" included in the section entitled *Futurism (1919-1942)*, Aeropittura and Arte Sacra Futurista are examined as a last production of Futurism. The manifesto is analysed in detail and contemporary comments and reviews at the time of the first Aeropittura exhibitions are reported. The relative significance attributed to Aeropittura in such an early stage in the reception of Futurism more broadly is significant:

The post-war period witnessed a resurgence of the Futurist principles and their embodiment in many of the artistic and practical phases of modern life. It also elaborated theories which had been in their embryonic stage before the war and resulted in the creation of aero-painting, aero-poetry, the mechanization of the theatre, a new type of decorative art, and the further development of word autonomy in literature.⁵⁵

Aeropittura was not the final spasm of a dying movement but the fulfilment and accomplishment of some artistic theories that were only approximately outlined in the previous period.

Crispoliti identifies 1958, the year of his first article, as the official beginning of studies on second Futurism. In his discussion he lists some key points about the interpretation and the reception of second Futurism. In the first instance, the art historian refutes a critical approach

⁵⁴ Rosa Trillo Clough, pp. 210, 211.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 169.

that gives the propriety to the political association of the movement. Instead of trying to defend second Futurism from the accusation of collaborationism, he attempts to demonstrate that every artist and movement in Italy at the time was involved with Fascism and supportive of the political system at many different levels, demolishing the conventional interpretation that considered second Futurism as the main agent for Fascist propaganda. In reference to the more Italian artistic panorama he describes second Futurism as an alternative to the strict figurative style of Novecento. According to Crispolti, one of the reasons for the delay in the scholarly attention given to Futurism was the fact that the majority of art critics in Italy had some sort of connection with Novecento.

As previously mentioned, the central focus of Crispolti's argument is the connection of second Futurism with the European avant-garde. Cubism, Dada, Russian Constructivism, Metaphysical painting, Bauhaus, Purism, l'Esprit Nouveau and Orphism are a few of the aesthetics and movements that Crispolti mentions as visual sources in relationship to second Futurism. Although all these cultural references seem to find some form of visual counterpart in the works, somehow the consequences of this approach led art historians to attempt to trace and follow all these threads without turning attention to the body of work itself, an attitude that is still evident in more recent studies of the movement. In a sense, Crispolti's approach may be interpreted as a means to find an internal coherence in an artistic production that explores so many different language and styles; the need to propose some classifications and categories that could tie together this very diverse body of works. By linking second Futurism with existing and already established aesthetic categories, the risky attempt of proposing new interpretations is avoided. At the same time, it can be argued that by indicating a broad range of styles associated with this period of Futurism the allegation of 'eclectism' and the lack of a unitary direction and internal coherence appeared to be confirmed. Occasionally the cultural references are simply too many. There is a strong sense that while the European artists were

not only perfectly aware of each other's existence, collaborating, exchanging ideas and influencing each other, the majority of the Futurists were relatively unknown outside Italy and were simply borrowing and appropriating elements from other movements.⁵⁶

In his later essay "Aspetti del Secondo Futurismo Torinese" published on the occasion of an exhibition in Modena, Crispolti seems to realise that all the styles described as related to Aeropittura may have created some confusion: "although in different ways, elements of Metaphysical painting, Purist and Constructivist post-Cubism and elements of the European Surrealism merged into the Futurist problematic. It was not a matter of 'eclecticism' but rather of largeness of cultural relationships".⁵⁷ He strongly believed that there was a need for further studies of the different styles within second Futurism itself and that it could not be considered just as the last development of the first wave but more in relationship to a broader European avant-garde. In a sense this has somehow diverted attention from a more critical analysis of the works to a more general analysis of the cultural context in which late Futurism developed. As far as Aeropittura is concerned, there is not a real development in the argument. Moreover, as a case study for Aeropittura he mentioned the example of Rosso's sculpture, and he identifies deterioration in the quality of the work of this sculpture once he concentrates his production on aerosculptures.

It therefore becomes apparent how, at this point in time, Crispolti did not regard Aeropittura as a valid Futurist production. When Aeropittura is mentioned, it is mainly to highlight the divergences within the movement in terms of ideology and the poor outcomes of some of the

⁵⁶ This also definitely contradicts the idea of an Italian artistic primacy with the result of eliminating any trace of 'Italianità' that the artists tried so hard to underline. A speculative interpretation could also be Crispolti's attempt to downplay the political association by contradicting the 'Italianità', one of the main points in Fascist ideology.

⁵⁷ Enrico Crispolti, Albino Galvano eds. *Aspetti del secondo Futurismo torinese: cinque pittori e uno scultore: Fillia, Mino Rosso, Diulgheroff, Oriani, Alimandi, Costa*. exh.cat. Turin (Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, 27 March-30 April 1962), p. 30. "Pur in diverso modo, confluivano nella problematica del secondo Futurismo e particolarmente del gruppo torinese, a questo livello cronologico, elementi dell'ideologia o della stessa fenomenologia figurale, del Futurismo, della Metafisica, del postcubismo purista e costruttiva del Surrealismo e parasurrealismo europeo. Non si trattava però di eclettismo piuttosto di ampiezza di rapporti culturali, perché poi alla resa dei conti sulle opere il timbro caratteristico di una peculiare ricerca è quasi sempre evidente".

theories outlined by more valid artists such as Fillia and Prampolini. Moreover, despite the fact that many artists defined themselves as 'aeropainters' rather than simply as Futurists, the historian does not attribute much importance to the role of Aeropittura in the late Futurist period. Instead Aeropittura is described simply as a style that emerged in the last period of second Futurism composed of both valid and ineffective art that Crispolti urged the reader to differentiate between. What he calls the 'best Aeropittura' is connected with Prampolini's cosmic idealism and some examples of mechanical art. The Aeropittura manifesto is transcribed in the text and the focus on spirituality, idealism and the spatial theme seems to be the most convincing, probably also due to the further artistic developments within Fontana's Manifesto in 1946. However, generally speaking, at this point in time Crispolti is not an enthusiast of most production from within the Aeropittura movement:

The years between 1928 and 1938 can be considered the most creative. Fillia died in 1936 and his departure determined the crisis of the *torinese* group. Prampolini remained alone and isolated to defend the values of second Futurism and deepen them theoretically. He had to defend the values also from the simplistic representations of Dottori, Depero, Benedetta and Tato and from the group of ingenuous illustrators of aeroplanes.⁵⁸

The majority of the artists were here described as simply illustrators of aeroplanes and not worthy of consideration. According to Crispolti, the manifesto of Aeropittura is not the theoretical basis of the Turin Group but only a 'dialectic pole'. Instead, due to the vocal and articulate nature of the two artists, Fillia and Prampolini's articles and writings constitute the real basis of the theories and principles inherent in second Futurism. In this climate of the

⁵⁸ Crispolti, *Il secondo Futurismo: Torino 1923-1938. 5 pittori + 1 scultore*, p. 46. "Fra il '29 e il '38 circa sono gli anni più creativi di questo tempo: Fillia muore nel 1936 e la sua scomparsa determina la crisi del gruppo torinese, Prampolini resta solo ed isolato a difendere i valori del secondo Futurismo ed approfondirli teoricamente (il grande Balla è già crollato poco oltre il '30 di fronte al disinteresse ad oltranza della critica e addirittura con gli anni degli stessi secondi Futuristi); a difenderli appunto anche dal semplicismo rappresentativo di Dottori, Depero, Benedetta e addirittura di Tato e dalla larga schiera di ingenui ed ignari imitatori di eliche ed aeroplani".

rediscovery of Futurism, even the second development enjoyed some form of popularity with many exhibitions organised and books published. Particularly popular were exhibitions and publications on single artists like the Prampolini's exhibition organised in Turin in 1963, or on Mino delle Site in 1965 and the key monograph on Prampolini by Filiberto Menna in 1967.⁵⁹ In other cases the attention was focused on a particular theme analysed through the entire Futurist trajectory as in the book by Crispolti *Il mito della macchina ed altri temi del Futurismo*.⁶⁰

The 1970s and the Change in the Reception of Aeropittura

Since 1953, despite the increasing number of studies on the second development of Futurism, it is difficult to find a study or research that specifically concentrates on Aeropittura. As indicated, the majority of exhibitions on Futurism tended to include only main figures from the first period and, even on the rare occasions when post-war Futurism was included, Aeropittura did not feature as a main artistic production within this.

In this respect, the exhibition *Aeropittura Futurista* that took place at the Galleria Blu in Milan in 1970 represents an important landmark in the reception of Aeropittura within the Italian art world.⁶¹ It was organised by Franco Passoni and involved about thirty aeropainters who exhibited their works. The preface of the catalogue includes a brief introduction describing the movement, the biographies of the artists and the manifesto. As far as the terminology is concerned, Passoni states that from 1929 onwards Futurist art gravitated around the idea of Aeropittura, and the word Futurism itself either lost importance or became only a prefix. From this perspective, the fact that Crispolti regards Aeropittura as a minor

⁵⁹ Filiberto Menna, *Enrico Prampolini* (Rome: De Luca, 1967).

⁶⁰ Enrico Crispolti, *Il mito della macchina e altri temi del Futurismo* (Trapani: Celebes, 1969).

⁶¹ Franco Passoni ed. *Aeropittura futurista: ottava mostra della stagione artistica 1969-1970*. exh. cat. Milan (Galleria Blu), 1970.

theme or a style, when the artists themselves stressed the importance of the aesthetic innovation of Aeropittura, is quite extraordinary. Passoni delineates a chronological development from first Futurism until Aeropittura followed by an accurate description of the movement itself. Finally, after seventeen years, the artists' interest in flight, concepts of aerial space and movement are critically explored. It may be argued that a new general interest and fascination with the themes of flight and the idea of aerial and cosmic space may have been boosted by the moon landing in 1969 and the general research being conducted at the time into space travel. The Futurists anticipated these themes in articles and writings "Stratosfera: La strada dell'avvenire" published in 1932 in the periodical *Futurismo* where the author Domenico Mastini discusses methods and new technology that will allow the human being to survive in space, the techniques to explore the universe and the problematics in relation to diet and oxygen supply.⁶² These sort of discussions were always looked upon with suspicion by the critics, however the fact that the topic suddenly became extremely popular and to some extent shifted the attitude towards some of the artists' writings, from being less the incredible rambles of visionaries to more the forerunners of new themes.

Moreover, Aeropittura partly benefited from a more general openness and curiosity towards the artistic movements of the period. In picturing the social and cultural context in which the reception of the artist Mario Sironi flourished, Emily Braun, in the introduction of her book *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, considers the shift in perception in relation to the artistic production of the Fascist period as a way to give voice to diversity.

In the 1970s as Fascist culture was being reappraised in the historical field, numerous exhibitions organized in Italy brought to light the richness and diversity of the arts and artists under the regime, rehabilitating whole careers and movements. Histories of the avant-garde admitted to the Fascist allegiance of the artists but inevitably emphasized their differences with, rather than their adherence to the

⁶² Domenico Mastini, "Stratosfera: la strada dell'avvenire", *Futurismo*, 13 November 1932, p. 2.

regime policies. Yet the perplexing fact remains that many if not most of Italy's most famous literary and artistic figures openly supported the regime or were ardent Fascist.⁶³

Therefore, this rediscovery of Aeropittura must be interpreted as part of a broader cultural shift in methodology. As with everyone else before him, Passoni comments on the fact that Aeropittura has been ignored and that they were then witnessing a new wave of interest. The claim about a new wave of interest in relation to post-war Futurism was made at least twice in twenty years. Despite the repeated claims about the need for more research on the topic, the same claim would be repeated again in the 1980s. It seems that every twenty or thirty years Aeropittura experiences a renewed attention but the process of rehabilitation never seems to be fully completed. Although the exhibition was mainly addressed to a specialised public, the show was very well attended. Reviews in newspapers and periodicals paid attention to Aeropittura's theory of flight and described the movement as a sort of discovery in the field of art history.⁶⁴ Carrieri, who was mentioned above in reference to Crispolti's historiography of second Futurism, states that the last exhibition on Aeropittura that he had the opportunity to visit was organised thirty years before. Some archival documents included in the Crali's collection at the MART in Rovereto describe the positive account that was given of the artists' works at the end of the exhibition and they report that the exhibition was so successful that the opening period had to be prolonged for one month.⁶⁵ However, the exhibition also caused some tensions within the Futurist movement itself and in particular between the painter Enzo Benedetto and Tullio Crali. According to Crali, Benedetto, a generation younger

⁶³ Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 4.

⁶⁴ "L'Aeropittura e la sua problematica espressiva", *Il Lavoro*, 2 November 1971; "Prende il volo l'Aeropittura dopo anni di strano silenzio", *L'Avanti*, 2 June 1970. "Milano", *Notiziario delle Arti*, 10 May 1970, "Aeropittura alla Galleria Blu", *Il Margutta*, September 1970 [Authors not given].

⁶⁵ Cra.6.257, Peppino Palazzoli (Galleria Blu), Letter to the artists, RE: "Relazione agli artisti espositori sulla mostra Aeropittura Futurista", Milan, 28 July, 1970. "La mostra è stata continuamente visitata tanto che ci siamo trovati nella necessità di prorogare il previsto periodo di aperture inizialmente fissato in un mese a oltre due mesi".

than the other Futurists, could not have taken part in this exhibition because only the 'original' aeropainters had the right to participate. Benedetto found this position very offensive and in his book *Futurismo centox100* published in 1975 omitted the exhibition at the Galleria Blu in the list of key events on Futurism and Aeropittura that took place after the Second World War.⁶⁶

The following year Passoni organised another Aeropittura exhibition in Legnano, a town near Milan. The catalogue constitutes a very interesting document in terms of both explaining the various stages of the organisation of the previous exhibition at the Galleria Blu, and also providing some new interpretative angles. As far as the aim of both exhibitions is concerned, Passoni embeds the events in a broader project of re-discovery of the movement: "to awaken the dormant interests and carry out a new analysis of this area of Italian art [...], new studies and observations of the phenomenon".⁶⁷ According to Passoni the organisation of the exhibition went through three very difficult phases. Firstly, tracing the artists and recovering their works proved to be very challenging. Secondly, it was very intense dealing with the artists because, as he discovered later, they felt completely forgotten and were accustomed to live in a sort of 'proud isolation'. However, what Passoni found most difficult was to fight against the common credence that regarded Aeropittura as simply Fascist propaganda. He had to use all his diplomacy in order to deal with the atmosphere dense with resentment, frustration and extremely complex and at times traumatic personal experiences.⁶⁸ It must

⁶⁶ Benedetto, *Futurismo centox100*, pp. 208-209.

⁶⁷ Franco Passoni, *L'esperienza dell'aero-spazio nella pittura contemporanea* (Milan: Emme/print, 1972), [p.1]. "Risvegliare gli interessi assopiti e puntualizzare un nuovo esame sugli esempi di questo settore dell'arte italiana, seguirono altre mostre, da me promosse, che cercarono di approfondire ulteriormente l'argomento mettendo a fuoco alcune singole personalità di questa corrente e le loro opere individuali, come contributo di studio e osservazione del fenomeno".

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 2. "Non è ancora stato divulgato il paziente lavoro di ricerca e di preparazione intrapreso nel 1969 con Palazzoli e Crali per organizzare la mostra di aeropittura Futurista alla galleria Blu. Ricordo che le fasi più difficili furono 3. La prima fu quella del ritrovamento degli artisti viventi e delle opere che erano disperse. La seconda quella del contatto con gli aeropittori e gli aeroscultori tutti più o meno restii a comunicare. In verità solo più tardi avemmo modo di spiegarci le ragioni umane di questa titubanza e riservatezza. Gli artisti si sentivano ormai da tempo completamente dimenticati e ignorati dal mondo ufficiale della cultura e in orgoglioso

have been unexpected to realise that climate of suspicion towards Futurism was still so prevalent in the 1970s. To some extent, by that period, the problematic combination of Futurism and Fascism was resolved in relation to the early period of Futurism and in academic environments more generally, but there is a sense that, at this point, the process of reconciliation begins again in reference to the post-war Futurism and Aeropittura in particular. By describing the aim and organisation of his second exhibition Passoni introduces a new argument:

The first section has a historical meaning due to the presence of aeropainters and aerosculptors linked to Marinetti's movement. The second section carries on with the intention to prove and demonstrate the topical value of aerospace within other contemporary artistic movements.⁶⁹

Passoni's approach seems to differ from Crispolti's analysis of Futurism. Instead of finding connections between Futurism and its contemporary artistic manifestation in Europe, Passoni stresses the importance of Aeropittura as a foundation of the future Italian art movement and in particular Fontana. This can clearly be seen as a consequence of the different approach of the two writers and their different research interests and academic backgrounds. However, as mentioned above, even Crispolti proposed the idea of a connection between Fontana and second Futurism but he limited his analysis to Prampolini's work. In 1992, the exhibition in Rome *Prampolini dal Futurismo all'Informale* curated by Crispolti, aimed to present the chronological line that connected Prampolini's works from the Futurist phase until the 1950s

isolamento, tranne qualche eccezione, si erano abituati a vivere nel limbo della dimenticanza [...]. La terza fase è senz'altro stata la più spinosa. A causa della strumentalizzazione politica operata dal fascismo che attraverso il carattere eroico aveva fatto dell'aeropittura uno strumento di propaganda ideologica, io ho dovuto fare appello a tutta la mia sensibilità diplomatica per districarmi in un terreno minato di sospetti nostalgici, alimentato dai rancori, dalle frustrazioni e da situazioni umane estremamente complesse".

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 11. "La prima sezione ha un significato storico dovuto alla presenza delle opere di pittori futuristi e in particolare degli aeropittori e aerosculptori legati al movimento marinettiano. [...] La seconda sezione persegue l'intenzione di provare e dimostrare l'attualità dell'esperienza dell'aerospazio all'interno di correnti e movimenti dell'arte in questi giorni".

and *Informale*.⁷⁰ A few years later in 1997, Sandra Solimano, in the exhibition catalogue *Futurismo: i grandi temi 1909-1944*, attributed the origin of Italian abstract art to the Futurism of the 1930s, contaminated with Kandinsky's surreal abstraction and the rationalism of Bauhaus and De Stijl.⁷¹ Later in his analysis, Passoni presents what it is now the accepted interpretation of the movement "the ultimate aim of this exhibition is trying to demonstrate that there has never been such a thing as a first, second and even a third Futurism. The movement developed according to an historical connection from the First World War to the Second World War in the 1940s".⁷² Passoni is keen not to use the definition 'second Futurism' but rather he sees the movement as a continuous and coherent development from the early 1910s until the Second World War.

This brief examination cannot list every single publication that has made reference to Aeropittura, instead what it is important is to use the main writings to define what has characterised the general reception of Aeropittura. This can also help to understand and clarify some more contemporary interpretations. Despite the fact that the first studies on 1930s Futurism took place in the 1950s, the 1970s represent a crucial stage not only for the Futurist studies in general but, for Aeropittura's reception more specifically. While in previous arguments Aeropittura was only considered as a limited style, it was now seen as the very core of Futurist art in the 1930s. This represented an opportunity for many artists to show their works and enjoy some level of visibility after many years when attention was mainly paid to a few figures involved in Aeropittura such as Prampolini and Fillia. Moreover, the period during which scholars showed a particular interest in connecting Aeropittura with

⁷⁰ Enrico Crispolti ed. *Prampolini dal Futurismo all'Informale*. exh. cat. Rome (Palazzo delle Esposizioni), 1992.

⁷¹ Enrico Crispolti and Franco Sborgi eds. *Futurismo: i grandi temi, 1909-1944*. exh. cat. Milan, 1998.

⁷² Passoni, [p. 12]. "Lo scopo finale di questa mostra è soprattutto quello di aver cercato di dimostrare che a mio giudizio e in contrasto con altri colleghi non è mai esistito un primo, un secondo e magari un terzo Futurismo. Il movimento marinettiano si è sviluppato secondo una linea di connessione storica sino agli inizi della seconda guerra mondiale negli anni quaranta".

post-war art had two important consequences; first of all, it distanced Aeropittura from the uncomfortable and until now enduring connection between the artistic movement and the political scenario. Secondly, it positioned Aeropittura as a foundation of a further ideology and it projected the movement into the future. In a sense, it is similar to the methodology deployed by Crispolti although in a different context. If art historians attempted to legitimise second Futurism by indicating several connections with widely recognised international artistic productions, critics are more likely to concentrate not on the contemporary links alone, but on the theoretical and aesthetic influence that Aeropittura had on future Italian art. However it does not appear that this process or rediscovery actually led to any consistent and exhaustive studies of the area or the movement. It was necessary to wait other ten years in order to see new research and interpretations of Aeropittura as a movement.

In the meantime, other key events and developments in the study of Futurism that had some bearing on Aeropittura did take place. An augmentation of academic interest in the period is demonstrated by some theses that were written on key artists such as Fillia and Prampolini and on 'second Futurism' more generally.⁷³ In the same period the exhibition *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo* curated by Crispolti in Turin in 1980 represented an exciting and precise excursus of the different media deployed by the Futurists in different periods including production normally neglected such as *plastica murale* and *Naturismo*.⁷⁴ Although the exhibition did not provide any particularly new reading of Futurism, the catalogue presents a great visual and documentary tool and is still considered a key publication for scholars and researchers. Due to the persistent efforts of some artists, Aeropittura acquired some popularity, even among the masses, and articles that described the latest developments in interpretation appeared in popular magazines. For example the article "Giustizia per i

⁷³ Only two examples: Caldiere Natalia, *Fillia. Il secondo Futurismo Torinese*, 1972. Alessandra Rasini, *Enrico Prampolini fra il primo e secondo Futurismo*, 1973 (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore).

⁷⁴ Enrico Crispolti ed. *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo*. exh. cat. Turin, 1980.

Futuristi” published in 1980 in *Gente* (People) featured an interview with the artist Tullio Crali about his experience as an aeropainter.⁷⁵ Although the first mention of Aeropittura as an artistic production since the outbreak of the Second World War was made around thirty years earlier, the convention of presenting Aeropittura as a newly rediscovered phenomenon was common practice:

The Futurist Aeropittura that in the 1930s was one of most explosive and controversial manifestations is coming back. New exhibitions are organised and many debates take place. The aim is finally to give justice to a movement that was mistakenly identified with Fascism and died with it. [...] The Futurism that was vilified, rejected, crushed and mistakenly identified with Fascism is resurging and [...] it will be the great discovery of the next few years. Italy and Europe have to come to terms with it.⁷⁶

In 1982 the exhibition *Anni trenta. Arte e cultura in Italia* attempted to describe the complete artistic Italian panorama in 1930s Italy; the aim was to re-evaluate ten forgotten years of Italian art and culture.

The prolonged concealing of the artistic culture of the period is a problem that can be understood but needs to be solved. Instead the period must be considered a useful and productive phase for Italian art. The inevitable fall of Fascism has caused an expulsion from the history of the Italian culture of the 1930s, the years of Fascism during which the production of visual art did not stop.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ “Giustizia per i Futuristi. Perché torna di attualità il movimento fondato da Marinetti nel 1909”, *Gente*, 1980 from Crali Cra.10.295 (MART Archive).

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 65, 69. “Torna il Futurismo e di conseguenza torna di attualità l’aeropittura che negli anni trenta e quaranta fu una delle sue esplosive e più discusse manifestazioni. Si allestiscono mostre, si aprono dibattiti, si cerca finalmente di dare giustizia a un movimento che a torto venne identificato con il fascismo e sepolto con esso....[...] Il Futurismo calunniato, respinto, soffocato, identificato a torto col fascismo, da un po’ di tempo in qua sta risorgendo e non usurpo affatto il mestiere di profeta se ti dico che sarà, a tutti i livelli, la grande riscoperta dei prossimi mesi, dei prossimi anni. L’Italia anzi l’Europa deve ancora fare i conti rimasti in sospeso”.

⁷⁷ Ibid., [p. 43]. “È un problema che può essere compreso ma che oggi va assolutamente rimosso, l’occultamento, praticato per decenni, del quadro generale della cultura artistica di questo periodo che deve essere considerato stagione utile e fruttuosa di opere per l’arte italiana. [...] Il crollo inevitabile e conseguente del fascismo, la sua fine rovinosa, hanno portato a una espulsione dalla storia della cultura italiana degli anni trenta, anni del fascismo, ma periodo in cui le arti visive in Italia non si sono fermate”.

A wide spectrum of movements and styles were included in the exhibition and the need to justify any associations between the art and Fascism was not a major concern for the curators. The political and ideological ambiguity of Italy in those years is taken as a sufficient explanation and on that basis the analysis is carried out with less prejudice than in previous periods. Aeropittura is included in this panorama of Italian art and the catalogue proposed what can be considered a traditional interpretation of Aeropittura within a schematic division between a first period very 'mechanically orientated' and a second more imaginative one.⁷⁸ In addition, the catalogue carries out both a peripheral analysis of Futurism's views about other contemporary movements and an internal examination in terms of the different dialectics within Aeropittura itself ('the operative areas'). Although the catalogue does not provide an extensive analysis of the theories and works of Aeropittura, the account given of the relationships and connections within the artistic world of the period is valuable, particularly considering the complicated context in which Aeropittura operated.

In 1985, Crispolti revised some of his previous arguments and criticism of Aeropittura and he eventually adopted the term Aeropittura to describe not just an artistic style but a more significant part of the Futurist artistic production in the 1930s. *Aeropittura Futurista Aeropittori* is the title given to an exhibition that he curated in 1985.⁷⁹ This time the term Aeropittura does not include only Fillia and Prampolini but other artists such as Monachesi, Benedetta, Crali, Tato and Ambrosi. Moreover what only a few years earlier was described as a ridiculous illustration of aeroplanes now becomes an expression of creativity and, in the case of Tullio Crali's work, an aesthetic close to Pop Art. Crispolti praises Aeropittura as he

⁷⁸ This was something that Crispolti previously suggested.

⁷⁹ Enrico Crispolti, *Aeropittura Futurista Aeropittori*. exh. cat. Modena, c.1985.

never did before: “the important painting and plastic works around the aeropainting imaginative world is a significant and relevant part”.⁸⁰

In the same year Claudia Salaris published a brief but important text that testified to the new found interest not only in Aeropittura art but especially in the literature, theoretical writings and manifestos of the movement. The book, entitled *Aero...Futurism e mito del volo*, is particularly focused on the idea and the theories of flight.⁸¹ Although the intention of this book was not to provide any new interpretation, this collection of published material is extremely useful and gives a sense of the quantity of documents that the artists produced compared with the limited research on the subject.

Despite the new view of Aeropittura presented in some of the publications mentioned above, it is very surprising that Crispolti in his work *Storia e critica del Futurismo* seems to hold back on his previous opinions about Aeropittura.⁸² The section about second Futurism is very similar to his previous writings and he stresses the fact that the authentic second Futurist was represented by Fillia and Prampolini and not by Dottori, Depero, Benedetta and Tato. Moreover the connections with the European avant-garde are not only over emphasised but there are just too many: second Futurism loses its identity in this complicated network of artistic links. Aeropittura is downgraded to a mere subsection of second Futurism; according to Crispolti, it is positioned on the same level as Futurist design and fashion. Crispolti is consistent in his admiration of the work of Fillia and Prampolini and the description of their work seems to be influenced by new research on Abstract Expressionism and in particular the work of Arshile Gorky:

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 29. “....il grande lavoro pittorico e plastico attorno all’immaginario aeropittorico sia parte rilevante e significativa.”

⁸¹ Claudia Salaris, *Aero...Futurismo e mito del volo* (Rome: Le Parole Gelate, 1985).

⁸² Enrico Crispolti, *Storia e critica del Futurismo* (Rome: Laterza, 1986).

For Fillia in particular the terms were overturned in a painful introversion that was populated by ghosts sometime very alarming. The formlessness of some of his pre-human images of these years constituted a value in terms of inner symbolism, as well as some of his cosmic prefigurations. At the same time in the parallel work of Prampolini a will of precision is perceived in which the arcane of metaphysical origins has to be interpreted as not yet known and not as unknown or unfathomable.⁸³

In 1989, the exhibition *Italian Art in the Twentieth Century* at the Royal Academy in London explored the artistic Italian panorama differently from previous events.⁸⁴ Consistent with its stated claim to provide an exhaustive historical overview of Italian artistic production in the twentieth century, it included post-war Futurism. Unsurprisingly, Crispolti contributed to the publication with the chapter entitled “Second Futurism” in which he presents some of his long held ideas on post-war Futurism. Aeropittura and in particular the ‘aero-pictorial’ or ‘cosmic’ phase are described as “the second creative chapter of second Futurism in sculpture, architecture and literature as well as painting” while the first phase of second Futurism is identified in mechanization when “individual objects and the human figure were broken down into standardized, emphatically volumetric part”.⁸⁵ In describing the body of works, Crispolti acknowledges that although “Aeropittura was interpreted in many different ways, [...] the overriding theme of flight was represented by two distinct means – poetic analogy and literal description”. The first means was exemplified in the work of Prampolini who deployed Aeropittura “as a visual metaphor for the transcendence of the spirit into a higher state of consciousness”, while the second includes the works of artists such as Tato, Ambrosi and Crali who “painted literal renditions of aeroplanes in flight, aerial views of landscapes

⁸³ Ibid., p. 265. “Per Fillia, in particolare, i termini erano capovolti in una dolorosa introversione, che si popolava di fantasmi a volte veramente allarmanti. L’informe di certe sue immagini preumane di questi anni ha valore appunto di simbolismo tutto interiore, altrettanto che certe sue prefigurazioni cosmiche, mentre nel Prampolini parallelo s’avverte come una volontà di previsione, ove l’arcano – d’origine storica metafisica vale come non ancora conosciuto e non tanto come ignoto e quasi insondabile”.

⁸⁴ Emily Braun ed. *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1900-1988* (New York: Prestel, 1989).

⁸⁵ Enrico Crispolti, “Second Futurism” in Braun, quotations in this page from pp. 167-170.

and the vertiginous effects of soaring heights.” The work of Dottori was mentioned as a combination of the language of the avant-garde and the Realists, depicting aerial views in a vivid scenography of stylized geometric and crystalline forms which focused on lyrical rather than dramatic aspects.” In the final remarks, Crispolti stressed that despite the fact that Futurism was not homogenous it had some form of distinctive character throughout the period and he particularly emphasised the significance of the late Futurist trajectory:

Second Futurism was not merely a revival of the first, but it did identify closely with the ideals of the original Futurist group, continuing to promote free experimentation and open dialogue with the international avant-garde and defending its cultural heritage, which was increasingly being ignored and marginalized by the Italian critics of the day.

The Renewed Interest in Aeropittura’s Celebration of Flight

Mostra dell’aria e della sua conquista was an exhibition organised in Naples in 1989.⁸⁶ This exhibition looked at Aeropittura from a different perspective and with a different approach. The analysis does not start from any justification or historical account. The exhibition mainly concentrates on the perception and representation of the ‘aerial’ environment. Probably for the first time, the theories about space and flight are examined as the main themes of Aeropittura.

The artists during centuries have represented this part of the universe and its stared nocturnal appearance without thinking about the characteristic structure of ether so different from the terrestrial and without tackling the spatial themes connected with the enormity and spatial open-endedness specific of this enormous globe of light.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Bruno Mantura, Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris and Livia Velani eds. *Mostra dell’aria e della sua conquista* (Rome: De Luca, c1989).

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 1. “Gli artisti nel corso dei secoli hanno rappresentato questa parte dell’universo e il suo aspetto notturno stellato da un punto di stazione sempre uguale senza porsi fatalmente il problema della precipua struttura dell’etere assai diversa da quella terrestre, senza affrontate quindi i temi spaziali connessi con la vastità e l’indeterminatezza spaziale specifiche i questo enorme globo di luce”.

Probably because of the success of this exhibition, a further event was organised in 1990 at the *Accademia Italiana* in London. *Futurism in Flight* curated by Bruno Mantura appears to be the first exhibition concentrated exclusively on Aeropittura held abroad since the 1930s.⁸⁸ Despite the fact that the content of the catalogue is very similar to previous exhibitions, this event was important in terms of increasing awareness of the movement outside of Italy. In the same period, there was a geographical shift in terms of interpretation and methodology. Aeropittura was a diversified and complex phenomenon that joined together artists from different areas and regions of Italy and an extensive analysis of all these different artists and groups has always constituted a difficult enterprise. As mentioned above, many publications report on the artists' writings and manifestos, but the majority do not go beyond reporting literally the artists' statements. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, most of the research is based on geographical areas in order to provide a more precise account of the diverse elements. *Futurismo Veneto*, *Futurismo in meridione* and *Futurismo in Romagna* are some of the exhibitions organised in line with this geographical approach.⁸⁹ This coincided with the publication of two very valid historiographical and social accounts of the period with particular reference to the political and cultural context. Günter Berghaus provides a compelling investigation of the interactions between Marinetti and the Futurist movement from the beginning until the death of Marinetti in 1944.⁹⁰ The scholar carries on his research with the support of newly discovered archival material such as the file about the antifascist activity of Marinetti compiled by the Fascist regime. In reference to the late development of the movement, Berghaus argues that the artistic manifestations under the umbrella of Futurism were emptied of any cultural ideology but mainly motivated by a desire to please

⁸⁸ Bruno Mantura and Patrizia Rosazza-Ferraris eds. *Futurism in Flight*. exh. cat. London, 1990.

⁸⁹ Maurizio Scudiero and Claudio Rebeschini eds. *Futurismo Veneto*. exh. cat. Padova (Palazzo del Monte), 1990; Enrico Crispolti ed. *Futurismo e meridione*. exh. cat. Napoli, 1996; Enrico Crispolti ed. *Il Futurismo in Romagna*. exh. cat. Rimini, 1986.

⁹⁰ Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909-1944* (Providence, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996).

the regime and gain some form of recognition. The difficulties that the movement faced in establishing itself and be accepted in the cultural milieu of Italy in the 1930s are supported by the analysis carried out in *Artecrazia* by Claudia Salaris.⁹¹ The study provides a very precise account of the sequence of events with particular attention to the role of the main theoretical tools such as the periodicals *Futurismo* and *Stile Futurista* in the artistic occurrence of the period. In 2001 another important exhibition was organised by Crispolti whose work seems to articulate the development of the different stages of criticism. His work on Futurism started in the 1950s and his research has constituted a constant contribution to the study of late Futurism. In 2001 the catalogue of the exhibition *Futurismo 1909-1944* held in Rome at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni discusses different Futurist artistic production across the whole period were discussed and the text also included a detailed discussion by Massimo Duranti on the manifesto of Aeropittura.⁹²

Between 2003 and 2005 many exhibitions that examined the theme of flight in reference to Aeropittura were organised in Italy and abroad. *In Volo. Futurist Aeropainting* was held in New York and curated by Alberto Fiz.⁹³ In his introduction to the catalogue Fiz acknowledges the change in interpretation concerning Aeropittura's chronology.

In the last decade Futurism and its various manifestations has been at the centre of a broad-ranging historical and critical analysis both in Italy and abroad. While in the early 1980s the tendency was to draw a clear distinction between the early Futurist movement and the experimentation of the later years, contemporary Italian criticism tends towards a sense of continuity with a view of the tendency as developing from 1909, the year of the first Futurist Manifesto to 1944, the year its prime mover Filippo Tommaso Marinetti died.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Claudia Salaris, *Artecrazia: l'avanguardia Futurista negli anni del Fascismo* (Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1992).

⁹² Enrico Crispolti ed. *Futurismo 1909-1944: Arte, Architettura, Spettacolo, Grafica, Letteratura...* exh. cat. Rome (Palazzo delle Esposizioni), 2001.

⁹³ Alberto Fiz ed. *In Volo: Aeropittura Futurista = Futurist Aeropainting*, exh. cat. New York, 2003.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

It seems very difficult to agree with the idea of a 'new' boost in research into Aeropittura when, since the 1950s, and every ten years since, the same claim has been repeatedly made. Moreover, the problem concerning continuity between first and second Futurism (or the separation between them) seems more a problem of terminology than a general interpretational issue. The artists did not see this as a problem at all, they never repudiated or distanced themselves from the first wave of Futurism but they were very much able to discern the differences.

Although the exhibition *Volare!*, which took place in Rome in 2003, was based on the wider topic of the fascination with aviation and the culture of flight in Italy in the 1930s, it provided a broad ranging analysis of Aeropittura in the catalogue. The relation between Aeropittura and European art is now limited to two poetics: Constructivism and Surrealism. Although the visual association between a part of Aeropittura and Surrealism seems obvious, it has to be remembered that the Futurist artists always expressed very strong negative opinions of Surrealism. A positive consequence of a more limited set of artistic influences and appropriation is that Aeropittura re-appropriated its own identity and creativity:

In visual art Italian Aeropittura will open new problematics: there is not any comparable movement. Despite the fact that observation from above will be applied both in the American painting and photograph when the idea of the metropolis and skyscrapers started being emphasised, [...] it was always a static vision. The great merit of aeropainters was the attempt they made to propose also the point of view of the observer.⁹⁵

As the catalogue points out, although Aeropittura may represent an original case in Italian modernism, the vision from above is clearly not a Futurist invention. Moreover it could be

⁹⁵ *Volare!*, p. 173. "Nelle arte visive saranno proprio gli italiani attraverso l'aeropittura ad aprirsi a nuove problematiche: non esistono altri movimenti paragonabili anche se l'osservazione dall'alto sarà assai praticata, sia nella pittura sia nella fotografia americana quando si cominciò a porre più forte l'accento sulla vita delle metropoli e quindi sui grattacieli. Ma si tratta pur sempre di una visione statica, mentre il grande merito degli aeropittori è proprio quello di aver tentato di proporre anche il punto di vista dell'osservatore."

argued that despite the claim of movement, the works themselves are little concerned with the idea of representing movement in traditional terms. As the next chapter of this thesis discusses, movement is symbolised in a way that seems to be very much in line with Boccioni's theories. In the catalogue, significant space is dedicated to the theory of space with particular reference to work by Fontana and his declared connections with Futurism. Another original section of the analysis is the connection between literature and Aeropainting in works such as *Night Flight* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and *Pylon* by the American William Faulkner.⁹⁶ Moreover the chapter "Lo sguardo dall'alto. Percorsi incrociati tra cinema e Aeropittura" mentions the film *Vitesse* (1931) by Tina Corder, Enrico Martina and Pippo Oriani, the only film produced by the aeropainters that tries to represent in animation some of the characteristics of Aeropittura's art. A shorter version of the film was part of the exhibition *Il futuro del Futurismo* held in Bergamo, Italy between 2007-2008 and very extensively and precisely analysed in the work of Giovanni Lista on Futurist cinema.⁹⁷ Finally in the chapter "Navis aerea" Maria Fratelli and Fabio Fornasari allude to some possible analogies between Italian art and the scientific world. In particular they explore the possible association between Einstein's theory of relativity with the artistic manifestations that developed after the Second World War and in particular Lucio Fontana and *Spazialismo*. Surprisingly, in delimiting the pre-war visual sources that operate a profound influence on Fontana, the text only mentions two single artists, Enrico Prampolini and Bruno Munari. Although not specifically concentrating on Aeropittura, the great emphasis on this Futurist production contributes to embed Aeropittura in a context in which it is seen to be relevant not only for its contemporary artistic world but also in reference to past and future artistic

⁹⁶ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, [*Vol de nuit*] *Night Flight* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1932); William Faulkner, *Pylon* (New York: Harrison Smith & Robert Haas, 1935).

⁹⁷ Giacinto Di Pierantonio and Maria Cristina Rodeschini eds., *Il futuro del Futurismo* exh. cat. Milan (GAMEeC), 2008; Giovanni Lista, *Le cinema Futuriste* (Paris: Experimental, 2008).

manifestations, joining together different disciplines and fields such as literature, cinema and science.

In this lively context of new studies Lista has made some key contributions which included his essay for the 2002 exhibition catalogue *La conquête de l'air. Une aventure dans l'art du XXe siècle*.⁹⁸ In his essay, "Vue aérienne et Aéropeinture Futuriste: Une métaphysique de l'espace", Lista provides a visual analysis of some of the works of Aeropittura inscribing them in a large discourse on Italian visual tradition, tracing the connections with the past artistic production long before first development of Futurism. It is also important to stress the significant role played by the art historian in recent time due to his extensive study of different aspects of Futurism including Aeropittura, cinema and photography.

The exhibition *Aeropittura and Aeroscultura Futurista* curated by Massimo Duranti not only paid attention to the painting production of Aeropittura but also included some sculptures that are more correctly defined as part of Futurist Aeroscultura.⁹⁹ As for the terminology, Duranti criticised the definition of second Futurism because of all the negative connotations that it carries with it.

It was defined as second Futurism by Crispolti at the end of the 1950s, an expression that was later misinterpreted by many scholars who recognised in the definition a minor Futurism, almost epigonic. Crispolti himself corrected the interpretation by explaining that Aeropainting as well as the other Futurist declinations of those years have to be considered as a development of Futurism.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Chrystelle Desbordes and Nakov Andréi eds. *La conquête de l'air. Un aventure dans l'art du XX siècle*. exh. cat. Toulouse, 2002.

⁹⁹ Massimo Duranti, *Aeropittura e Aeroscultura Futurista*. exh. cat Perugia, 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 10. "Lo stesso che come accennato fu definito "Secondo Futurismo" da Enrico Crispolti alla fine degli anni cinquanta, espressione poi travisata dalla maggior parte dei critici che vi indicarono un Futurismo minore quasi epigonico. Lo stesso Crispolti si affrettò a correggere l'interpretazione della sua definizione precisando che l'aeropittura come le altre declinazione Futuriste di quegli anni sono da considerare "sviluppi del Futurismo".

In reference to some form of chronological continuity with previous art productions, Duranti agrees with Lista's claim that the artists' recuperate some figurative suggestions and themes from traditional Italian art.

About the genesis of Aeropittura, the philological explanation of the development of Futurism does not prevent us from researching more remote cultural influences than the ones within Futurism itself. In term of influences, we can agree with Giovanni Lista who suggests that the vision from above was already present in Roman art and was directed towards the global image of the city as ethical value. The vision returns in Lorenzetti in Siena, the Renaissance in Venice and Florence. In this aerial representation there is then a significant component of Italian tradition, which, in Aeropittura becomes real because of the 'conquest of the air'. As has been already mentioned it is not only the material perspective of the vision that changes but also the mental condition of the representation that catalyses artists' expressivity.¹⁰¹

The research at this point is no longer focused reporting and transcribing artists' statements or the manifesto but increasing attention is paid to establishing relationships and tracing associations between the artists' theoretical statements and their artistic production. This requires a more critical engagement with the works themselves paying particular attention to identifying correspondences and contradictions.

In 2004 and 2005, exhibitions such as *Voolare* and *Nello spazio, nel cosmo* examined the theme of flight as a motive in different art productions.¹⁰² Aeropittura is inserted into a general context of artistic interest in the cosmos and sky that include several Italian and European artists. In the catalogue of *Nello spazio, nel cosmo* edited by Ada Masoero and

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 7 "Sulla genesi dell'Aeropittura, la motivazione filologica di sviluppo del Futurismo non esime dal ricercare ascendenti culturali più remoti e motivazioni più specifiche allo stesso interno del Futurismo. Quanto agli ascendenti è da condividere la tesi di Giovanni Lista, che sottolinea come la vista dall'altro era già nell'arte romana ed era rivolta all'immagine globale della città come valore etico. Visione che ritorna in Lorenzetti a Siena, col Rinascimento a Venezia e a Firenze. C'è dunque in questa rappresentazione aerea virtuale una tradizione tutta italiana che nell'aeropittura Futurista diventa reale per la conquista del volo. Come accennato non cambia però solo la prospettiva materiale della visione ma anche la condizione mentale della rappresentazione che catalizza l'espressività degli artisti".

¹⁰² Mara Borzone ed. *Voolare*, exh. cat. La Spezia, 2004; Ada Masoero and Danna Battaglia Olgiati eds. *Nello spazio, nel cosmo*. exh. cat. Milan, 2005.

Danna Battaglia Olgiati the central focus is once again the notion of ‘cosmic idealism’ introduced by Prampolini and Fillia’s work.

In 2005 the exhibition *Futurist Skies* was organised at the Estorick Collection of Italian Art in London.¹⁰³ Despite the limited size of the exhibition and some negative reviews, it can be valued as part of a long-term project undertaken by the gallery of re-evaluation and reassessment of Italian art, and Futurism in particular, that continues until now. The focus of the exhibition was Aeropittura and its relationship with aviation. Interestingly, one of the chapters of the catalogue examines the relationship between Aeropittura and religion. This theme was further explored in an exhibition organised in 2007 in the same gallery entitled *Piety and Pragmatism. Spiritualism in Futurist Art*.¹⁰⁴ This show made available to the public the much neglected production of religious Futurist art, which found theoretical articulation in the manifesto of sacred art published by the Futurists in 1931.¹⁰⁵ This exhibition proposes a selection of works that feature the theme of flight and religious suggestions.

As previously discussed, during the 1930s Aeropittura did not constitute the main focus of the Italian artistic panorama. However with the support and the influence of Marinetti it was able to gain some space and visibility. The artists’ participation in cultural and artistic events was often a matter of negotiation and concession and in some cases it represented, as suggested by Berghaus in his discussion on the role of Futurism in the 1930s, a real struggle for survival. Unlike Novecento, that could take advantage of the privileged role of Margherita Sarfatti within the Fascist entourage, aeropainters never played a key part in the cultural and artistic activities despite their effort in proving their loyalty and potential instrumental role within the cultural policies of the Fascist regime. If in the 1930s the artists defended

¹⁰³ Renato Miracco ed. *Futurist Skies: Italian Aeropainting*, exh. cat. London (Estorick Collection), 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Massimo Duranti, Renato Miracco, Roberta Cremoncini and Christopher Adam eds. *Piety and Pragmatism. Spiritualism in Futurist Art*, exh. cat. London (Estorick Collection), 2007.

¹⁰⁵ “Manifesto dell’Arte Sacra Futurista”, *Gazzetta del Popolo*, 23 June 1931.

themselves from the allegation of producing degenerate art and being Bolsheviks; after the fall of Fascism they struggled to avoid being accused of collaborationism. This problematic condition induced some artists to choose a different career or to be isolated and become accustomed to living in anonymity. In the 1950s Crispolti and other scholars after him, had the great merit to begin a process of rediscovery of this forgotten reality of Italian art and concentrated their energy on producing extensive studies and research. At first, Crispolti inserted Aeropittura into the broader category of second Futurism as only a style and a rather unsuccessful Futurist artistic production. He privileged artists such as Prampolini and Fillia, relegating the rest to only a very marginal role. Coherently with a strongly historically based methodology, he focused on an extensive examination of the aesthetic and theoretical connections between second Futurism and the European avant-garde. Crispolti's interpretation played a successful part in providing artistic legitimacy to the movement and since the 1950s Aeropittura has recuperated a role in artistic criticism and analysis of the period. On the other hand, this approach has caused a sort of loss of the real identity of Aeropittura that became blurred in the repeated attempts to trace the different visual sources and influences in their art. In a sense during the 1950s the interpretation of Aeropittura was entrapped in a thick net of connections with other forms of artistic practices. From an identification of Aeropittura as appropriation of other forms of artistic language, the interpretation then moved to consider the works of late Futurism as an important reference and inspiration for future Italian artists such as Fontana and the Nuclear movement. Although it was still an analysis based on a comparison with alternative art production, the reference made with a future artistic production constituted progress towards the future. Aeropittura was not merely copying, or in the best case scenario taking part in a dialogue, with the contemporary European artistic milieu, but by re-appropriating its identity it could in fact provide a solid artistic legacy for Italian art in the aftermath of the Second World War. In

other instances, the analysis has been based on geographical division and, more recently, art historians have looked back associating Aeropittura with the art of the past reinstating its production within the very tradition of Italian culture.

The terminology and chronology of Aeropittura have always constituted a problematic ambiguity. The adoption of the term Aeropittura instead of the more general 'second Futurism', or vice versa, has often been a substitute for a discussion about the real identity and nature of this artistic occurrence. The real question is whether the change of terminology between Futurism, second Futurism or Aeropittura in any way affects the interpretation of their artistic production itself. At first sight it may seem that with the adoption of the term Aeropittura, the production acquires a sort of independence from its Futurist origin replacing a terminology that includes the adjective 'Futurist' with a more self-contained definition. Aeropittura is self explanatory and straightforward in introducing its key theme, the interest in flight and the new spatial dimension in painting. However, the artists involved in Aeropittura did not exclusively concentrate on painting, rather they assert the importance of being involved in different forms of artistic productions. Perhaps the more general classification of Aerofuturism may prove to be more useful, despite the fact that it was never really adopted by the artists. Mostly, they called themselves aeropainters without in any way disowning their legacy within the general Futurist movement. Aeropittura's interpretation has been based on changes and negotiations and it can be speculated that the analysis itself, characterised by changes and shifts, may resemble the nature of their art with its continuous variations between different features and styles. From the 1970s, criticism concentrated specifically on the definition of Aeropittura. By distancing itself from the general category of second Futurism, it acquired a more defined identity that also legitimated and encouraged a more extensive analysis of Aeropittura's themes and characteristics. The idea of flight as a

key theme was to some extent a discovery of the 1990s, when in many exhibitions this topic was finally illuminated and examined.

Although this thesis is more focused on examining the reception under the general umbrella of Aeropittura and therefore does not concentrate on the body of work of specific artists, it is important to remember that over time key publications have appeared on artists actively involved in Aeropittura such as Fillia, Prampolini, Dottori and Mino delle Site. Moreover, considering the large amount of artists' texts that has been published, very few of them have been interpreted and put in perspective with their art. According to some sources, around five hundred aeropainters operated in Italy in the 1930s. It is unrealistic to consider examining them all, although most of them surely deserve more attention and consideration than they have received. Undoubtedly the centenary of Futurism, celebrated in 2009 has encouraged a discussion and further research into Futurism. Possibly the main theme that has been discussed in the events organised within the centenary celebrations is the concept and nature of the Futurist legacy. However, the different methodology and approaches have attracted strong criticism. Crispolti, still very active in research on Futurism, appears to be very critical of the events and operation carried out around the centenary:

It has to be said that we enter this year of the centenary of the Futurist foundational manifesto in a totally inadequate way, in a definitely low-key tone, with disorder, approximation and improvisation. Once again, it has turned out to be a lost opportunity for a significant unitary initiative of national coherence and support as well as international significance. [...] Throughout the Italian peninsula, expensive Futurist exhibitions are organised. They are often unmotivated and need to be signalled primarily for their equivocal nature, absences, presence of marginal and dubious works, and even forgeries.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Enrico Crispolti, "Futurismo Oggi", *L'Unità*, 27 January 2009, pp. 38-39. "Difficile poter dire che in questo anno del centenario del 'manifesto di fondazione' del Futurismo non si sia entrati in modo del tutto inadeguato, decisamente sottotono, con molto disordine, molta approssimazione e improvvisazione. Ancora una volta si è infatti persa l'occasione per una grande iniziativa unitaria di consistenza e supporto nazionale ma di portata internazionale. Si susseguono lungo la penisola mostre Futuriste anche dispendiose di cui si fatica a comprendere il senso e che si segnalano più per immotivazione, equivoci, assenze, presenza spesso di opere marginali, dubbie, quanto non clamorosi falsi".

The art historian Massimo Duranti, constantly involved in researching Aeropittura, provides a similarly critical account of the initiatives organised as part of the celebrations for the centenary:

On the occasion of the centenary, a disconnected and confused plethora of initiatives is announced, the events are mainly exhibitions (while we were expecting more conferences and publications) all characterised by a curatorial monopoly. [...] All these exhibitions are characterised by an anachronistic vision of Futurism, of the 1950s when the critics and historians were more preoccupied with the collusions with Fascism than the innovative continuity that Marinetti's supporters expressed until the 1940s.¹⁰⁷

The two world wars have somehow constituted the chronological and historical boundaries in any artistic criticism on Futurism perpetuating the idea of a separation, which was never perceived by the artists themselves. The exhibition *Il futuro del Futurismo* courageously aimed to project the ideas and theory of Futurism into the future. Although the exhibition did not focus on late Futurism or Aeropittura, it is interesting to see how some of the themes and works explored by the aeropainters were integrated into this exhibition. The exhibition was divided into themes such as 'Futurism revisited', 'metropolitan energy', and 'anarchism from tradition'. The aim was to identify the innovative ideas that have inspired, and consequently been adopted by other artists and carried on into the future. Crispolti, who was interviewed for the catalogue, explains how some of the ideas that survived have developed in different ways. He underlines the need to research and study the artists who elaborated later on some Futurist ideas and unconsciously conducted a dialogue within the Futurist discourse.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Massimo Duranti, <http://criticaFuturista.blogspot.com/>. Access 11 May 2010. "Da qui alla ricorrenza si annuncia una confusa e scollegata pletora di iniziative, per la verità solo espositive (ci si aspettavano convegni e pubblicazioni) e tutte contraddistinte da un incomprensibile monopolio curatoriale. Queste e possibili altre mostre, a quanto trapela, sarebbero tutte caratterizzate da una visione del Futurismo anacronistica, quella degli anni Cinquanta dei critici e degli storici dell'arte più preoccupati delle collusioni col fascismo, che non di quanto i marinettiani avevano espresso con continuità innovativa fino all'inizio degli anni Quaranta".

¹⁰⁸ *Il futuro del Futurismo*, pp. 36-39.

As a consequence of the boost in research generated by the centenary, several publications have recently appeared. In many cases these new studies constitute a valuable source for an engagement with artists' writing. Berghaus's publication of Marinetti's writings and Yale's collection of Futurist manifestos and documents cover a wide chronological scope from 1909 to 1944, which demonstrates once again how critics now generally agree in the need to consider Futurism as a long trajectory that lasted almost forty years.¹⁰⁹ A more critically engaged and art history based study is *Inventing Futurism. The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* by Christine Poggi published in 2008.¹¹⁰ Poggi's analysis of Futurism is again dedicated to the entire Futurist period and she proposes an analysis of some the key themes including a fascinating chapter entitled "The Return of the Repressed". The chapter was previously published in the book *Donatello among the Blackshirts*¹¹¹ that aimed examine the visual culture during Fascism and extensively discusses some of the ideas on flight and space in Aeropittura.

The study *I Futuristi e le Quadriennali*, published in 2008, together with the new and expanded version of the *Archivi del Futurismo* in several volumes due to published from May 2010 represent, according to Crispolti, not only a rare example of publications resulting from the initiatives organised for the centenary of Futurism but more generally are an example of some of the very few positive products.¹¹² While it is not possible at this stage to discuss the new *Archivi del Futurismo*, it becomes clear that the documents so much desired by Crispolti

¹⁰⁹ Günter Berghaus ed. *F.T. Marinetti. Critical Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006); Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi, and Laura Wittman eds. *Futurism: an Anthology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹¹⁰ Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism. The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: University Press, 2008).

¹¹¹ Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J Crum eds. *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹¹² Gino Agnese, Giovanna Bonasegale and Enrico Crispolti, eds. *I Futuristi e le Quadriennali* (Milan: Electa, 2009). As in July 2010, the new *Archivi del Futurismo* were not yet published.

propose a unitary view of the Futurist movement and will certainly become a valuable tool for any future research on Futurism.

A far as artistic events are concerned, the most important showcases for Futurism in the year of the centenary were represented by the many exhibitions held all over the world: from small and regional exhibitions that tended to reflect local circumstances, to the national and international blockbusters where the most valuable and famous works could be admired. In 2008, the exhibition *Le Futurisme à Paris. Une avant-garde explosive* organised at the Centre Pompidou in Paris was the first stage of a touring event that then moved to Rome with some minor adjustments and ended at Tate Modern in London in September 2009.¹¹³ Although the cultural impact of making such a substantial and, still relatively unknown body of works available to the public, cannot be underestimated, both the curatorial choices of the single exhibition and the very concept of the entire project have been subject to strong criticism. In particular, the choice of ending the exhibition in 1916 was perceived as a deliberate decision to avoid any controversy around the political nature and associations of the movement. However, as a result, the very attempt to divert attention from any political discussion resulted in significant controversy around the role of politics in the movement. Moreover, the absence of around thirty years of Futurist art has itself represented a moment for discussion, by deluding and animating the experts and at the same time stimulating the curiosity of the general public that was not able to find answers to some of the key questions conventionally surrounding Futurism. Crispolti again provides his own reading of the event in this quotation that summarises many opinions on this topic:

As happened in Paris at the Pompidou, it seems still possible to reduce a presentation of Futurism only to 1912 and to fragment the movement and the concept of 'Futurist reconstruction of the universe' separating the range of multiple creative activities and ignoring the

¹¹³ Centre Pompidou, *Le Futurisme à Paris. Une Avant-garde Explosive*. exh. cat. Paris, 2008.

complementary character of these practices in innovating the everyday life (according to the Futurist principle of art-life). The exhibition lacks in discussing the multiple solicitations of Futurist sources and developments (dynamic visions of the city, architecture, high tech, plasticism, internal design, environments, performances, fashion, and advertising) and impact on the contemporary visual research within the international scene but also in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century.¹¹⁴

Duranti expresses a similar concern with reference to the Paris exhibition:

According to the rumours, Futurism will play the part of the 'thin slice of ham in a sandwich'; trapped between two massive 'slices' of Cubism: the one that preceded the appearance of Futurism and the one that followed the first wave. The dialectic between the two movements [Futurism and Cubism] will be re-proposed from a totally French perspective.¹¹⁵

In reference to the Parisian exhibition, another criticism concerns the importance of the connection with Cubism as a source of inspiration for the Futurist artists which in a sense represents a way of going back to the old ideas that Futurism not only finished in 1916 but also represents a consequence and collateral effect of other artistic manifestations. The constant comparison between the French and Italian artists seemed to imply that a valid interpretation of Futurism can only be made by comparison with other forms of art.

The extent of the continuity or internal separation within the movement remains a much discussed issue and although the critics tend to agree in assigning continuity throughout the

¹¹⁴ Crispolti, *L'Unità*. "Ecco dunque, come accaduto a Parigi al Pompidou, che si ritenga ancora possibile ridurre una presentazione del Futurismo al 1912. E altrimenti di disaggregare il movimento rispetto al ventaglio d'attività creative molteplici (che spesso interessavano una medesima personalità, come Balla o Depero o Prampolini) di una possibile 'ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo', ignorando di queste il carattere complementare in un'intenzione di un coinvolgimento innovativo del vissuto quotidiano (secondo il principio Futurista 'arte-vita'). D'altra parte manca una riflessione sulla molteplicità di sollecitazioni di matrice Futurista (dalla visione dinamica della città, all'architettura, sia 'high-tec', sia d'espressività plastica, all'ambientazione e l'environment', dal comportamento e lo 'happening', dalla moda alla pubblicità) alla fenomenologia della ricerca plastico-visiva contemporanea, sulla scena artistica internazionale ma anzitutto su quella italiana, della metà del XX secolo".

¹¹⁵ Massimo Durante, <http://criticaFuturista.blogspot.com/> Access 11 May 2010. "Secondo indiscrezioni, il Futurismo farebbe la parte della sottile fetta di prosciutto di un sandwich imprigionato da due grandi fette di Cubismo: quello prima della nascita del Futurismo e quello che seguì la prima ondata marinettiana. Si riproporrebbe dunque la dialettica fra i due movimenti, ma prevedibilmente da un'ottica tutta francese."

whole Futurist trajectory, it is generally agreed that *Aeropittura* does nevertheless represent a novelty in the artistic production of Futurism. As in the Parisian event, the 2009 exhibition entitled *Futurism* at the Tate Gallery also only showed works produced before 1916, virtually excluding any form of late Futurism in the exhibition altogether. Although every institution has the legitimate right to make choices in reference to how to structure and curate an exhibition, the comprehensive and unambiguous title *Futurism* seems to suggest the intent to present an exhaustive display of Futurist art from the origin of the movement to its end. In spite of being a legitimate choice, excluding all artistic production after 1916 can have some negative consequences, not least in preventing a more informed debate, denying the spectators the opportunity to compare and evaluate across the entire spectrum of works produced by Futurists. Matthew Gale, the curator of the London exhibition, when questioned about the chronological choice during a conference in London, argued that the curatorial choice was also informed by the need to avoid engaging in a political dispute, however, despite their choice Gale lamented how the majority of questions in fact gravitated around the supposed Fascist nature of the movement although the exhibition did not make any reference to this particular area.¹¹⁶ In this case, the act itself of excluding and neglecting can sometimes be more vocal and strident than silence.

A major exhibition that presented an alternative to the events organised in Paris, London and Rome was the exhibition on Futurism curated by Lista and Ada Masoero and held at the Palazzo Reale in Milan from February to June 2009.¹¹⁷ In recent years Lista has published extensively on different Futurist artistic productions ranging from photography, cinema and painting often with great attention to the artistic developments that took place within

¹¹⁶ Conferences *Back to the Futurists: Avant-gardes 1909-2009*. Queen Mary University of London, 2-4 July 2009.

¹¹⁷ Giovanni Lista and Ada Masoero, *Futurismo 1909-2009. Velocità+arte+azione*. exh. cat. Milan (Palazzo Reale), 2009.

Aeropittura. The large exhibition was organised into several rooms following, alternatively, a chronological or thematic division, presenting a whole range of works mostly owned by private collectors, very rarely shown in public. In a sense this exhibition seemed to propose an updated version of *Ricostruzione futurista dell'universo* or *I grandi temi del Futurismo 1909-1944* - the comprehensive landmark shows organised by Crispolti respectively in 1980 and 1998. The catalogue does not indulge in any discussion of politics, something that Lista often does not seem to consider as indispensable in his analysis of Aeropittura. In the section *Gli anni trenta: l'Aeropittura*, Lista presents this artistic production starting from a discussion on the concept of aerial vision and proceeding in identifying the cultural sources of the artist's interest in flight. In the catalogue, Lista divided the text into paragraphs discussing the manifesto of Aeropittura, the artistic perceptions of the aerial vision and the cosmic idealism introduced by Prampolini and *polimaterismo*. An original part of this exhibition is the last room entitled *L'eredità del Futurismo*. In this section Lista examines how different artists have responded to the Futurist aesthetic in particular after the Second World War including the obvious choices, such as Lucio Fontana and Alberto Burri, as well as the interesting visual poetry and tantalizing work of artists such as Mario Schifano and Piero Dorazio. The artistic reception of Futurism is a key aspect that deserves further study. Particularly significant is the identification of the selected elements appropriated by the artists and how the movement was perceived as a whole or fragmented in different periods.

The last chapter of this thesis will examine the work of Luca Buvoli, recipient of the 2010 Guggenheim Fellowship, as a case study of an artist who has extensively engaged with Futurist ideology and develops one the most important themes of Aeropittura to create very imaginative work and therefore, indirectly, perpetuate the recognition of the originality of the movement. In the 2007 Biennale, Buvoli presented a work based on the theme of flight that

was subsequently presented in other venues both in Europe and United States. In his impressive installation entitled “A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow”¹¹⁸ Buvoli

...explores flight - its possibilities and metaphors - in art that incorporates the media of drawing, sculpture, painting, animated films, videos, and artist's comic books. Ephemeral often transparent materials and trembling lines convey the tentative aspects of flying made all the more fraught by the conditions of travel and war today.¹¹⁹

In some way he tries to represent the dream and the magic of flight that ‘crashes’ against the brutality of reality. He uses flight as a theme but in a sort of unenthusiastic and pessimistic way. Instead of representing and celebrating the Futurist excitement for the dream of flight, Buvoli revisited this theme with a more disillusioned attitude to testify how this theme is not only very topical but can also be deconstructed and reformulated from many different perspectives.

¹¹⁸ Luca Buvoli, *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow—Un Bellissimo Dopodomani*. A project for the 52nd International Venice Biennale <http://www.lucabuvoli.com> 10/04/2008.

¹¹⁹ Christine Poggi, http://www.lucabuvoli.com/ramp_buvoli_final-1.pdf. Access 10/04/2008.

Chapter 2 Space in Aeropittura

In 1909, in the founding Futurist manifesto, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti announced that ‘time and space died yesterday’. This is perhaps the most famous statement included in the document and has been endlessly repeated in discourses on Futurist ideology. However, whilst this claim illustrates the radical nature of Futurist aesthetics, it perhaps should not be taken as a definitive statement of belief.

Since the publication of the manifesto in *Le Figaro*, the Futurists maintained that ideologically they were mainly concerned with the nature of time rather than the concept of space. History and the past were attacked, an attitude that brought the Futurists into conflict with the leading Italian cultural institutions. The ‘language of rupture’ that they advocated in their aesthetic demanded a distinct break with the past, or, more specifically, with history. However, the religion of speed and simultaneity advocated by the Futurists necessitates a discourse on spatiality. Although the attitude towards the concept of time in the first development of Futurism has been intensely debated, the notion of space in Futurist ideology seems to attract significantly less interest. The originality of the Futurism movement, whose very name is informed by a clear reference to time, mainly resides in its revolutionary perception of the past and future. An awareness of spatiality also constitutes a vital component in late Futurist aesthetics and Aeropittura in particular. As this thesis has argued in previous sections, the vocal and eloquent nature of the Futurists shaped an academic literature on Aeropittura mainly concerned with an appropriation and often literary transcription of the artists’ statements and writings without engaging in a more grounding critical analysis of their aesthetic goal. Expressions such as ‘cosmic dimension’ and ‘idealism’, ‘overcoming of perspective’, ‘mental and physical space’ have often been

regurgitated with reference to Aeropittura without grounding these phrases in an analysis of the specific artworks of the period or providing a theoretical or critical framework.

Although some recent studies seem to challenge this ingrained attitude, the attributes, qualities and significance of space in Aeropittura's artistic production still demand a careful consideration. This chapter will begin with an overview of some influential theories on space that were developed at the beginning of the twentieth century and an analysis of the extent to which these postulations were generated by the popularisation of scientific theories and discoveries. The examination will then proceed with an analysis of how and to what extent the Futurists were actually aware of these scientific theories. This will lead to a brief consideration of the attitude of Futurism towards science in general and whether this attitude evolved throughout the entire Futurist period. The second part of the chapter will include an analysis of the cultural and historical contexts in which Aeropittura developed its remarkable interest in flight and the aerial view. It will also examine the extent to which these elements progressed into a multifaceted visual language.

Reconfiguring Space

Within the Futurist aesthetic, the Renaissance use of perspective was the most maligned symbol of the Italian artistic tradition. It occupied such a prominent role in the art of the museums that it became a target as a form of institution itself. As many remarkable studies on the subject have indicated¹, the invention and introduction of Renaissance perspective were directly linked with the surge of a new cultural awareness in Italian and in particular Florentine society. In his highly influential study on the origin of perspective, Erwin

¹ Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective* (London: The Mit Press, 1995); John White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London: Faber, 1987); Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1988); Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

Panofsky argues that the new way in which the Renaissance artists perceived the world was a consequence of a change in society, and the artistic application of the rules of perspective was a visual manifestation of this transformation. At a very pragmatic level, perspective constituted a scientific and technical realisation. Panofsky states that “this perspectival achievement is nothing other than a concrete expression of a contemporary advance in epistemology or natural philosophy”.² Panofsky does not mention any particular technological means or inventions that were specifically involved in the alteration of the Renaissance cultural climate. However, he describes a cultural and scientific milieu in which mathematics, philosophy and astronomy were substantially inductive of changes in artistic practices and goals.

Similarly, any convincing analysis of the spatial theories developed between the nineteenth and the twentieth century should also include a reference to the new development in scientific thinking, the successive popularisation of these theories and their infusion into the cultural or artistic world. Stephen Kern in his study *The Culture of Time and Space* proposes a compelling investigation of the evolution of notions of space and time in the twentieth century.³ In particular he examines the significant changes in the concepts of movement, speed, nature of space and time in reference to technological and scientific advancements. Acceleration in transport and communications provided a more effective access to new spaces that resulted in an enlarged perception of spatiality resulting in ideas of global space. Understandings and perceptions of space and time were completely transformed by the new discoveries in technology and science. The improvement and circulation of technology between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries caused not only a physical expansion and acceleration of the experience of space but also contributed to develop a new notion of the

² Panofsky, pp. 65-66.

³ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

abstract and mental space. Kern describes the extent to which space acquires a plurality of meanings never imagined before. Space was not a void to be filled or shaped by objects but became an inherent element that contributes to create the environment. This idea of space as a constructing element was only the first step towards that liberation of space from its unchanging, fixed and absolute Euclidean nature. In recent works such as *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre and *Evictions* by Rosalyn Deutsche, the nature of space is scrutinised in all its different aspects.⁴ Space and its symbolic interpretations become an opportunity for an increasingly complex discourse on the essence, experience, production, representation, and exploitation of spatial theories.

In the twentieth century, in the Italian artistic context, the concept of perspective conveyed a specific and very charged meaning. It symbolised the artistic legacy with a national past and therefore it should come as no surprise that the Futurists strongly rejected it. However, the overcoming of perspective rules occurred in a much broader artistic context. Cubist art is probably the most exemplary and investigated paradigm of modernist representation of space. The artists' depiction of multi-perspectives was the visual materialization of the overcoming of the old conception of a heterogeneous space. While Panofsky did not indicate any particular scientific discovery or innovation at the origin of Renaissance perspective, Siegfried Giedion in his work *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* directly links Cubism with the new electronic/electromagnetic age:

Cubism breaks with Renaissance perspective. It views objects relatively: that is, from several points of view, no one of which has exclusive authority. And in so dissecting objects it sees them simultaneously from all sides [...] It goes around and into its objects. Thus to the three dimensions of the Renaissance which have held good as constituent facts throughout so many centuries, there is added a fourth one – time [...] The presentation of objects from several

⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Chicago, Illinois: Blackwell, 1991); Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (London: The Mit Press, 1998).

points? of view introduces a principle which is intimately bound up with modern life – simultaneity. It is a temporal coincidence that Einstein should have begun his famous work *Elektrodynamik Bewegter Körper* in 1905 with a careful definition of simultaneity.⁵

In their book *Du Cubisme* published in France in 1912, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger attacked the Futurists and, in particular, Umberto Boccioni, claiming that the French avant-garde was the only interpreter of modernity.⁶ As a consequence of the publication Boccioni undertook his personal fight against Gleizes's and Metzinger's statements not only through his artistic production but also in critical writings, mainly published in the periodical *Lacerba*. Boccioni argued that while the Cubists were trying to represent the mental experience of perceiving objects the Futurists were actually depicting the very essence of an object in its formation and the interpenetration of objects in space. Boccioni questioned the space represented by the Cubists. According to the artist, the Cubists attempted to represent a multi-perspectival space that was a product of a mental construction. Instead the Futurists claimed to attempt to represent the experiential space, and the object in its development and making. The use of geometry was itself considered inappropriate because geometry does not exist in nature.

In *I rumori della strada invadono la casa* (Figure 3 - Street Noises Invade the House, 1911) Boccioni creates an environment in which the interior space merges with the exterior and the senses are enhanced by the stimulation of urban environment. The noises and the street life penetrate the house and the private space represented by the familiar figure of Boccioni's mother in order to create an uninterrupted and continuous ambience. As will be further discussed in this text, Boccioni's aesthetic has often been interpreted in relation to Bergson's

⁵ Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. 5th ed. [First published in 1941] (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 436.

⁶ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Cubism [Du Cubisme]* (Sisteron: Éditions Présence, 1980) [First English edition 1913].

philosophy of time and space and although the Italian artist never clearly defined his relationship with the French philosopher he freely borrowed some of the general principles and terminology. The mechanical representation of movement and Futurist *fotodinamismo* condemned by Boccioni can be associated to Bergson's rejection of the fragmented representation of movement. According to Bergson, time cannot be fragmented into smaller partitions; this would imply a distortion of the real nature of time and space. Boccioni in *Pittura and scultura Futuriste* explains:

It seems clear to me that this succession is not to be found in repetition of legs, arms and figures as many people have stupidly believed, but is achieved through the intuitive search for the unique form which gives continuity in space.⁷

The concept of *durée* and flux together with the impossibility of fragmenting time in measurable entities were applied to spatial forms and particularly manifested in Boccioni's sculptural production. The twentieth-century challenge to the Euclidean unitary image of space and its replacement with an interchange between time and space through experience became therefore especially influential in his aesthetic. Nevertheless, Boccioni and the other Futurists employed specific pictorial strategies in order to represent the enlargement of physical space as an ontological and creational process. As Anna Maria Brescia describes, *linee di forza* (lines of force) considered as "linear directions which translate into visual terms the dynamic forces of the object" were intended to enlarge the boundaries of the object, allowing the environment to penetrate its entity.⁸ Lines, forms, and colours are interpreted as forces and not descriptive tools. Movement is not confined within the frame of the picture but expands outside to the outer space, with the intention to drag the spectator into the action.

⁷ Umberto Boccioni, *Pittura e scultura Futuriste* (Milan: Abscondita, 2006 [first published in 1914]) p. 95. "Questo succedersi, mi sembra ormai chiaro, non lo afferriamo con la ripetizione di gamba, di braccia, di figure, come molti hanno stupidamente supposto, ma vi giungiamo attraverso la ricerca intuitiva della forma che dia continuità nello spazio".

⁸ Anna Maria Brescia, *The Aesthetic Theories of Futurism* (Columbia University, Ph.D, 1971), p. 158.

‘Lines of force’ are linear directions which translate into visual terms the dynamic forces of the object. They represent the forces of matter and their path is determined by the mass of the object (centripetal directions) and its expansive action (centrifugal directions). [...] It is clear that the lines of force approach splits the object at its boundaries and opens it up to the surrounding space and to other objects in the environment.⁹

I funerali dell’anarchico Galli (Figure 4 - The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli) completed by Carlo Carrà in 1911 depicts the riot caused by police intervention during the funeral of an anarchist. The artist traces the origins of the painting in his personal experience of the events.

Without wishing I found myself at the centre of the struggle. I saw the coffin covered with red carnations swaying dangerously on the shoulders of the pallbearers; I saw the horses growing restive, the clubs and lances clashing, so that it seemed to me that the coffin could fall to the ground at any moment and be trampled on by the horses. Terribly impressed, I made a sketch of what I had seen as soon as I returned home. Later on this drawing served as the basis for the painting *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli*.¹⁰

In this painting the lines of force radiating from the movement of the bodies expands and occupies the surrounding space. The energy of the crowd and the confusion generated by the riot create a compelling and energetic atmosphere. The Futurists’ fascination with the crowd shows their desire to multiply the sensation and represent a maximised experience. *I funerali dell’anarchico Galli* is only one example of the wide range of production in which the Futurists explored their interest in the binomial combination crowd/power.¹¹ In his statements, Carrà explains how his personal involvement and experience in the event compelled him to create this works. The importance of the experience and intuition in the

⁹ Ibid., pp. 158, 159-160.

¹⁰ Carlo Carrà published in Sylvia Martin, *Futurism* (London: Taschen, 2006), p. 36.

¹¹ See the chapter “Folla/Follia” in Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism. The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: University Press, 2008).

Futurist ideology constitutes another link with Bergson's philosophy. According to Linda Dalrymple Henderson:

Bergson's theory of knowledge, his epistemology, is dualist. There are, he says, two distinct types of cognitive activity. On the one hand is conceptual knowledge, directed towards the requirements of our practical life and lending itself to the analytical procedures of the natural sciences. This then is objective knowledge. But there is also a more subjective kind of knowledge, subjective in that it is a projection of our intimate self-awareness on to the external world, for which Bergson's term is *Intuition*.¹²

Boccioni considers the experience of the painter indispensable in the perception of space. The process of creation originates from a personal experience or intuition of space and then irradiates towards the surroundings to constitute a unique being. In this respect Boccioni stressed the importance of putting the viewer, either the artist or the spectator, at the centre of the representation. In his polemic with Cubism, Boccioni states that Cubist space is only the result of an intellectual process that has no counterpart in the reality of things. Boccioni never questioned the value of the painted image or the sculptural work. However, according to Bergson intuition is inexpressible and any attempt to convert the intuition into an image results in the annihilation of the feeling itself. As Antliff explains:

In Bergson's philosophy, every expressive medium, whether it be plastic, literary, or musical, is the end of a process whereby the inner, manifold self becomes spatialized through the process of self-representation. Psychologically, such externalization is manifest in the transition from a highly emotive and alogical state to a non-emotive, rational state of mind. The temporal analogue for this change is the transposition of indivisible duration into a multiplicity of moments each external to the next, whose divisible state veils their inner interpenetration. This fragmented self is both rational and adapted to social life. Thus it becomes evident that all forms of self-representation would seem self-defeating -inevitably the profound self

¹² Brian Petrie, "Boccioni and Bergson", *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 116, n. 852, March 1974, p. 141.

is refracted and impoverished through the very mechanism of self-representation.¹³

In *Forme uniche di continuità nello spazio* (Figure 5 - Unique Forms of Continuity in Space) Boccioni attempts to represent simultaneously the object in its formation and the perception of the spectator. This work was praised by Boccioni as the visual image of the opposing qualities described as positive and negative space. The interchange between the object and the surrounding space is embodied in the projectile forms of this new Futurist man in which the sculpture summarises the fundamental elements of the Futurist aesthetics: movement without repetition, the representation of an invincible Futurist man, the mechanical sublimation of the human being and the constant exchange between object and environment perceived through a succession of negative and positive micro-spaces. Significantly, and as this text will attempt to demonstrate, the relevance of these principles was never repudiated or questioned even in the later period of Futurism; instead the Futurists transfigured and translated these propositions into a new language.

The notion of overcoming Euclidean space in art has often been discussed in conjunction with the idea of a fourth dimension and the impact that this had on artists' attempt to interpret this higher space in a variety of different ways. William Dunning, in his study of the history and development of pictorial space, explains that:

Science, which had already begun to permeate literature and philosophy in the eighteenth century, exerted even more influence on artists. The dispassionate methods of enquiry employed by science, its combined use of observation, logical reasoning and experiment were put to good use in other disciplines. Whole new realities suddenly became available to the artist through new discoveries, such as non Euclidean geometry.¹⁴

¹³ Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 48.

¹⁴ William V. Dunning, *Changing Images of Pictorial Space: A History of Spatial Illusion in Painting* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 115.

Science

The popularization of scientific theories offered the artists the opportunity to engage with, translate and appropriate these theories in a different range of works. Henderson provides a broad study on the impact that the popularization of the fourth dimension had in art:

Associated initially with the geometry of Cubism's faceted forms and multiple views, the fourth dimension was also variously identified with gravity (Duchamp, Schamberg) as well as antigravity (Malevich, Lissitzky, Van Doesburg), spirals (Boccioni, Severini), the airless Platonic realm of Synthetic Cubism and in America with tactility and significant form in the art of Cézanne. Because of the time element in hyperspace philosophy, motion also became an important attribute of the fourth dimension – in the motion studies of Kupka, Duchamp and Boccioni and in the abstract art of Malevich, Lissitzky and Van Doesburg, as well as in architecture (Van Doesburg, Fuller) and film (Bruguière, Eisenstein).¹⁵

As Henderson underlines, Boccioni, among other artists, engaged with the concept of the fourth dimension in different aspects of his production. However, the Futurist interpretation of the notion of the fourth dimension has been debated extensively. According to Henderson the idea of four dimensional space proposed by the Futurists had its root not only in the Bergsonian philosophy but mainly in the concept of hyperspace that can be found in Hinton's *Fourth Dimension* and in particular the importance attributed to movement as a key element in achieving a perception of the fourth dimension.¹⁶ She argues that Boccioni became interested in the fourth dimension after his stay in Paris in 1912 and not because of the popularization of the fourth dimension in Italy at the time. However, Mark Antliff in the article "Fourth Dimension and Futurism: a Politicized Space" associates Boccioni's

¹⁵ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art: Conclusion", *Leonardo*, vol. 17, n. 3, 1984, p. 205.

¹⁶ C. Howard Hinton, *The Fourth Dimension: A Language of Space* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2005) [First edition 1904].

interpretation of the fourth dimension more closely with Bergson's theory and the concept of time and intuition and to the use of spectatorial space for a political agenda:

Thus, the force lines and force forms springing forth from Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* were designed to involve the spectator in the very politics that led to Italy's intervention in World War I and, ultimately, to the rise of Fascism in Italy.¹⁷

Although the aim of this chapter is not to provide an extensive discussion on what the fourth dimension symbolises for Boccioni, it is relevant that both scholars agree to consider the popularization of the fourth dimension as a key factor in the development of the theories of space in early Futurism.

The publication of Einstein's theory of relativity in 1915 gave a further impulse to the popularisation of spatial theories by also implementing a change in the meaning of the fourth dimension. The addition of time reinforced the perception of the end of a fixed, unchanging and static space. "Time and space were no longer absolute; they were suddenly relative to the position of the observer".¹⁸ However the significance and the alleged impact that this had on artistic production is still a cause of controversy. Both the genesis of these influences and also the effects that were produced as a consequence of the exchange between art and science are motives of dispute.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Einstein had posited that the fourth dimension - about which there would be so much ado later in the century - must be the relationship between time and space. Simultaneously, and apparently independently, artists began to wonder how they could hope to capture our world from a single viewpoint and in three dimensions - height, width and depth - when our reality could obviously be viewed from many different and

¹⁷ Mark Antliff, "The Fourth Dimension and Futurism: A Politicized Space", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 82, n. 4 2000, p. 731.

¹⁸ Dunning, p. 154.

equally valid points of view and seemed to exist in four dimensions.¹⁹

Dunning comments upon the apparent independence of the artists who, autonomously from the scientific researches carried on in the period, challenged the traditional pictorial space and translated the new spatial theories into visual material. On the other hand, Henderson argues that Einstein's relativity theories produced a different effect on artists. According to Henderson they were not interested any more in the research of a higher space within the realm of fourth dimension.

Emerging in an era of dissatisfaction with materialism and positivism, the fourth dimension gave rise to an entire idealist and even mystical philosophical systems such as that of Hinton. Only the popularization of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, with its redefinition of the fourth dimension as time instead of space, brought an end to this era in which artists, writers, and musicians believed they could express a higher spatial dimension.²⁰

Alongside a discussion on the supposed different effects that Einstein had on the cultural world, some historians have challenged the existence of an influence or exchange between relativity theory and the artistic sphere. In 1946 Einstein himself, in reference to Picasso's art, claimed the new artistic language had nothing in common with his theory of relativity. Meyer Schapiro in *The Unity of Picasso's Art* supports this interpretation and in his chapter "Einstein and Picasso" attempts to dismantle both Siegfried Giedion and Erwin Panofsky's argument of an association between Cubism and Einstein's relativity.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

²⁰ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. ixx.

²¹ Meyer Schapiro, *The Unity of Picasso's Art* (New York: George Braziller), 2001.

Chronology is another problematic issue. Henderson claims that the mistake of art historians has been to interpret Cubist writing of the 1910-11 period in the light of theories that were not published until 1915-1916.

It is safe to say that Einstein's Special and General theories of Relativity did not have any real impact on French artists until the 1920s. [...] In the context of the history of ideas, Relativity Theory represented for the public of 1920 what "the fourth dimension had been to the public of 1909."²²

If we accept that, in the 1920s, relativity theory replaced the fourth dimension in the artistic imaginary, any discourse on 1930s Futurist art in relation to science should concentrate on Einstein's relativity theory rather than the fourth dimension embraced by Boccioni.²³ Henderson in "Einstein and Twentieth Century Art: a Romance of Many Dimensions" proposes an investigation of Einstein's physics in the artistic sphere similar to the previous study into the fourth dimension.²⁴ Fascinated not only by the insertion of the notion of time into art, other elements related to relativity theory also triggered artists' imaginations. The directions that their thoughts took encompassed the new speed of light, dynamism and an interest in matter that often resulted in the emergence of organic shapes and distortion of forms. Einstein's relativity was the definitive overcoming of Euclidean space that the fourth dimension had announced a few years before and, either as a consequence or independently, artists embraced a "dimensionally amorphous space with no definite horizons or clear spatial orientation".²⁵ Despite the brevity of this analysis, it emerges that the supposed impact of

²² Henderson, pp. 364, 356.

²³ However, since Aeropittura repeatedly claimed its legacy with Umberto Boccioni and the first Futurism, it is necessary to explore whether the fourth dimension was still vital for the artists who operated in a later period.

²⁴ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "Einstein and Twentieth Century Art: a Romance of Many Dimensions" in Peter Galison, Gerald Holton and Silvan Schweber eds. *Einstein in the 21st Century. His Legacy in Science, Art and Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 117. In introducing her work on the fourth dimension, Henderson states: "From its earliest days the fourth dimension had quickly acquired a variety of non-geometric association – from mystical higher consciousness and infinity to science fiction usage – that made it attractive to a wide range of artists. Einstein

both the fourth dimension and Einstein's relativity theory on artistic creation has caused a lively debate. The different practices in artistic appropriations and the different modalities in which the artists embraced the popularisation of scientific theories perhaps prevent us from reaching a definite conclusion. Nevertheless, the tantalizing possibility of a hypothetical intersection between the sciences and art in the approach to spatial theories in Futurist aesthetics deserves to be considered. A consideration of the reception and popularisation of Einstein's theories in Italy and the general Futurist attitude to science appears to be the natural starting point.

Leonard Shlain in his examination of the interchanges between art and science considers Marinetti's famous statement 'time and space died yesterday' as a summarisation of the paper on electrodynamics of moving bodies presented by Einstein in 1905.

Einstein's 1905 article in an arcane German physics journal did not make its way to Italy to influence the new painters. Once again, artists had divined a change in the direction of the wind blowing through a culture and they produced a body of work that heralded the change before the popularizers of scientific ideas were able to elaborate the concepts.²⁶

Although Marinetti would have surely agreed upon his ability 'to divine a change' in the cultural and scientific world, the expression 'time and space died yesterday' is probably not sufficient to prove that Marinetti and the other Futurists were aware of Einstein's theory and that with that expression the controversial founder of the Futurist movement was referring to the time and space elaborated in the new physics. In the article "Quarta dimensione di matematici ed artisti" published in *La Città Futurista* on 1st April 1929 Marinetti mentions Pawlowsky, Hinton, Poincaré, Silberstein and Oupensky, Eddington and Maeterlinck as

Relativity, by contrast, represented a much more specifically scientific or mathematical source, which was also less immediately suggestive to the visual imagination of artists."

²⁶ Leonard Shlain, *Art and Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time, and Light* (New York: William Morrow, 1993), p. 207.

referents for the fourth dimension and how, according to these scientists and philosophers, the fourth dimension involved either space or time in different theories.²⁷ He also mentions the idea of *dinamismo plastico* for Boccioni and how it represented and realised the fourth dimension. The ultimate aim is to prove that the artistic genius is superior to the mathematic genius. This could have been a great occasion to include Einstein's theories in his discussion but from the text Marinetti seems more inclined to discuss the first type of fourth dimension as suggested by Henderson.

Nevertheless, Einstein maintained a close relationship with Italy from the 1910s until mid-1930s. He was fluent in Italian and between 1915 and 1930 he engaged in a correspondence with the scientist Tullio Levi-Civita. In one of his letters he specifically asked the scholar to communicate in Italian because, having lived in the country as a child, he was keen to practice the language. Interestingly, Einstein's Relativity was made very accessible to the general public and his theories were discussed in Italy at the time. The periodical *Scientia*, a journal focused on the philosophy of science published extensively on Einstein's theories and the connections between science, aesthetics and astronomy. In 1927 they presented the publication of a *catalogo astrografico stellare* as an important tool that could have had an impact in astronomy.²⁸ In 1932 the article *The Age of Stars* discussed how the space dimension of the universe had grown in the years preceding the publication of the article and noted that "there is a prevalent tendency to work on a larger scale in both time and space in spite of the fact that we live shorter and bodily occupy perhaps less room than our remote ancestors".²⁹ The 1935 article "Significance of Fourth Dimensional Geometry" by W.V.Metcalf discussed on whether we have to rely on intuition or logic in our analysis of

²⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Quarta dimensione di matematici ed artisti", *La Città Futurista*, 1 April 1929, p. 2.

²⁸ G.A. Favaro, "Un grande esempio di collaborazione internazionale: il catalogo e la carta fotografica del cielo", *Scientia*, Vol. XLI n.CLXXIX-3, 1927, p. 1.

²⁹ Ludwik Silberstein, "The Age of the Stars", *Scientia*, Vol. LII, N. CCXLIII-7, 1932, p. 11.

fourth dimension. According to the author there is no conflict between the fourth dimension and our intuition of space as three dimensional: "Fourth dimension as a pure abstract mathematical creation having no physical existence and expressing no possible concrete concept".³⁰

Lynn Gamwell reports that, in the 1930s, there was an active government agenda on the development of science that culminated with the foundation of a new research institute in Rome where the young and promising scientist Enrico Fermi was employed to carry on his research in subatomic physics and "to help recruit bright students and instil enthusiasm in the general public for the new science".³¹ The author also continues by saying that the public that attended Fermi's many lectures on the theory of relativity, the structure of the atom and the nature of light at the Italian Association for the Advancement of Science, also included some of the Futurists such as Fedele Azari, Gerardo Dottori and Enrico Prampolini who intensified their contacts with the Italian capital or, in some cases, had settled to Rome after the First World War. Between the years 1926 and 1938 Fermi worked in Rome experimenting on the atomic nucleus, and one of his studies was (prematurely) announced as the discovery of a new atom. In 1938 he received the Nobel Prize in physics in Stockholm and on that occasion fled to America with his Jewish wife and the rest of his family. As Pontus Hulten points out, the Futurists were not only interested in scientific development in general but they were very much aware of single scientific discoveries:

The Futurists were familiar with experiments in electrodynamics transmission and with Einstein's relativity theories. They had also taken an interest in complex fields of energy in terms of variations in physical flow that could determine velocity and laws of motion. Most importantly they had become acquainted with Roentgen's studies of

³⁰ W.V.Metcalf, "Significance of 'Fourth Dimensional Geometry'", *Scientia*, Vol. LVIII, N. CCLXXXIII-11, 1935, p. 265.

³¹ Lynn Gamwell, *Exploring the Invisible. Art, Science and the Spiritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 260.

the energy of light and Marey's analysis of motion, the basis of photodynamic photography and of the optical-volumetric decomposition of space and time in painting and sculpture.³²

An analysis of the Futurist texts and writings could contribute to form a clearer understanding of the Futurist interpretation of science and the role reserved for the scientific method. Technology and the scientific function of the machine as one of the main achievements of the modern age have always constituted a vital part of the Futurist ideology. In 1914 Marinetti published the text "Geometrical and Mechanical Splendour of the Numerical Sensibility" in which he summarises some indispensable mechanical characteristics to be applied to the Futurist prose and narratives.³³ Marinetti encourages the use of mathematical science in Futurist writings because of the marvellous synthesis by which complicated concepts can be resolved in 'definite lyrical equations'. The numbers needed to be intuitively chosen and they had to express 'transcendental intensities'. The scientific methodology was freely borrowed by the Futurists and applied both in theoretical writings and visual arts. Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra in "Weights, Measures and prices of Artistic Genius: Futurist Manifesto" proposes the measurement of Futurist art in scientific terms:

The Futurist measurement of an artwork means an exact scientific specification expressed in formulae that state the quality of cerebral energy represented by the work itself, independently of the impressions, whether good, bad, or nonexistent, which people may have of the work.³⁴

³² Pontus Hulten, *Futurism & Futurisms* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p. 566.

³³ F.T. Marinetti, "Geometrical and Mechanical Splendour of the Numerical Sensibility" (18 March 1914) in Christine Poggi, Lawrence Rainey, and Laura Wittman eds. *Futurism: An Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 175-180.

³⁴ Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra, "Weights, Measures and prices of Artistic Genius: Futurist Manifesto", in *Futurism: an Anthology*, pp. 181-186.

The artist Fortunato Depero stresses the importance of the relationship between geometry and art in the essay “Geometria decorativismo aerodinamica”.³⁵ According to Depero, medicine, physics, technology and chemistry have developed together with art by applying the new Futurist approach to dynamism and synthesis. Once again the artists show their conviction of how art and scientific method are not only compatible but mutually beneficial. *La scienza Futurista* 1916 provides a clearer account of the Futurist assessment of science.³⁶ In the document the signatories propose a dynamic science not devoted to a classificatory and definite explanation of nature but an inquisitive and energetic action directly inspired by reality. The Futurist science had a duty to embrace the unknown, to explore new worlds and new knowledge. Reason and intellect could not be at the foundation of this scientific method but only intuition and the fascination with the unknown could prompt an eventually successful scientific enterprise. The idea of continuous development and evolution informed the Italian debate around the nature of science. As mentioned above, science was an important component of the Italian political agenda and the popularisation of science animated political rhetoric. Barbara Reeves explains that the debate around the theory of relativity gravitated around the juxtaposition of the concepts of revolutionary and reactionary and the translation of these terms into a political sphere.

Whatever the connotations of the use of the term ‘revolutionary’ for Einstein theories had been in Italy before the war – intellectual, political, modernist or even just fashionable – the political and cultural climate in Italy after the war would not permit [...] to use the language of revolution when advocating relativity. All practitioners and promoters of relativity in their own work, in their teaching and in popular articles for journals such as *Scientia* and *Elettrotecnica* and articles and interviews for newspaper – all stressed continuity with the

³⁵ Dep-ES-VI-P16BIS, Depero Collection (MART Archive).

³⁶ Corra, Ginna, Chiti, Settimelli, Carli, Mara e Nannetti, “La scienza Futurista (Antitedesca, Avventurosa, Capricciosa, Sicurezzofoba, Ebbra d'Ignoto). Manifesto Futurista”, *L'Italia Futurista*, 15 June 1916, 1, n. 2, p. 1.

past, improvement, generalization, progress: in effect, evolution rather than revolution.³⁷

The change in the perception of science was also advocated by Mussolini as early as 1921:

...relativity is a most daring and destructive theoretical construction...in Italy it is just a fact. Fascism has been a super-relativist movement because it has never sought to give definite 'programmatic' dress to its complex and powerful states of mind, but has proceeded by intuitions and fragments... Everything I have said and done recently is relativity by *intuition*.³⁸

Mussolini explains how the programme of its party was constantly changing: a "continuous formulation and transformation." He advocates the end of scientism, "the decline of the myth of science, understood as the discoverer of absolute truths".³⁹ The political appropriation of scientific and cultural themes appears to be a constant strategy in the Fascist, and occasionally Futurist, ideology. In his statement Mussolini not only explicitly compares his political movement to the new concept of science transformed by relativity theory and formulated five years before in *La scienza Futurista* but he also mentions intuition as the force behind the development in his political agenda. As previously discussed, the word intuition frequently appears in Boccioni's writing as a consequence of his interest in Bergson's theory. Moreover the concept of intuition informed the philosophy of Benedetto Croce who extensively published on aesthetics from the 1910s until the 1940s and he was profoundly influenced by John Dewey's *Art as Experience*.⁴⁰ Unlike Bergson, the Italian philosopher never attained an ontological value to experience and intuition but he believed the latter to be at the root of any artistic creation. The use of cultural and artistic themes in a

³⁷, Barbara J. Reeves, "Einstein Politicized: The Early Reception of Relativity in Italy" in Thomas F. Glick ed. *The Comparative Reception of Relativity: Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Springer, 1987), p. 197.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 212.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 212.

⁴⁰ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (Chicago: Perigee Trade, 2005).

way that can be defined as *retrospective* was common practice in the communication methods employed by Marinetti. The majority of his 'programmatic' manifestos actually drew inspiration from artistic practices that had already been implemented by the artists. By doing so, the very nature of the manifesto itself as programmatic document is distorted and the authorship of ideas is challenged. In the interpretation and study of the Futurist movement the manifestos have always represented a milestone. However, in a careful analysis of the Futurist canon the retroactive aspect of the majority of the manifestos should be taken into account.

The Futurists were not only lured by the potentialities offered by scientific discovery but also deployed science to legitimise their artistic production and, at the same time, to reinforce their faith in the scientific method itself. Ruggiero Micheloni, the author of "Dimostrazione scientifica del Futurismo" published a series of articles in *Futurismo* in 1934 in which he attempts to trace the origin of the Futurist aesthetic in science and in particular in Darwin's theories on evolution.⁴¹ The articles try to demonstrate how the beauty of the classical visual language cannot be applicable to modern man. Instead, the modern aesthetic intuition had to derive from mechanical rationality and the character of evolution. Through a rather obscure logical reasoning he then concludes that Futurism is the more appropriate aesthetic for the modern man.

In 1932, in the article "Scienza e Futurismo" published in *Futurismo*, the engineer Paolo Uccello linked science with Futurism claiming that they were "different views of the same landscape and the different chemical phases of the same solution" and "they both fight against the stereotypical schemes".⁴² Arnaldo Ginna, who became very much involved in the

⁴¹ Ruggiero Micheloni, "Dimostrazione scientifica del Futurismo", *Futurismo*, (15 March, p. 8), (1 April, 1934, p. 5), (15 April, 1934, p. 5), (15 May 1934, p. 5), (1 June 1934, p. 2), (15 June 1934, p. 5).

⁴² Paolo Uccello, "Scienza e Futurismo", *Futurismo*, 27 November 1932, p. 5; Paolo Uccello also published an article entitled "Scienza Futurista. Iperspazio", *Futurismo*, 18 December 1932, p. 5.

debate focused on Futurism and science, enthusiastically commented on the contribution adding that he had himself been working on an article on Futurism and science due to be published shortly. In fact, in “Scienzarte” followed by “Scienza Futurista. Investigazioni sulle tre dimensioni” published in 1933 in *Futurismo*, Ginna made a clearer reference to Einstein’s relativity theory as a basis for his discussion on the interpenetration between science and art.⁴³ In particular he aspires to reach a scientific result through artistic means. Therefore the intent is not to engage with new scientific developments or a particular discovery, but the rather ambitious aim is to deploy art in order to produce science. The Futurists probably considered this achievement as the ultimate legitimation of their art practices. Ginna states that “the sensorial pictorial phenomenon, courageously encouraged by the insistent desire of new discoveries, had to be refined to the point of find itself almost unexpectedly, in the field of pure scientific, geometric and mathematical abstraction”.⁴⁴ Although the author is very approximate in his approach to science and rather obscure about what the actual process would entail, the article reinforces the idea of a strong interest by the Futurists in the fourth dimension and the idea of a physical higher space. *Scienzarte* is seen as a pure method of analysis of the forces and psychophysics laws: “With our *scienzartistica* we have discovered that the force (geologic and organic) that informed the rocks, the olive tree and the surrounding terrain is an intelligent and characteristic force no less than the human force”.⁴⁵ This attitude towards science was often presented in the Futurist periodicals in 1930s when they extensively discuss cosmic theories and the association with discovery of a new space by Aeropittura.

⁴³Arnaldo Ginna, “Scienzarte”, *Futurismo*, 1 January 1933 p. 3; Arnaldo Ginna, “Scienza Futurista. Investigazioni sulle tre dimensioni”, *Futurismo*, 29 January 1933, p. 5.

⁴⁴Arnaldo Ginna, “Scienzarte”, p. 5. “Il fenomeno sensoriale pittorico, spinto coraggiosamente dall’assillante desiderio di scoperte nuove, doveva raffinarsi talmente da trovarsi quasi inaspettatamente, nel campo dell’astrazione pura scientifica, geometrica, matematica”.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 5. “Con la nostra investigazione scienzartistica abbiamo scoperto che la forza (geologica e vegetale) che informa la roccia, l’ulivo, il terreno circostante ecc. È una forza intelligente e caratteristica nè più nè meno di quella umana”.

By investigating the dimensions represented by ideal or material lines of an object, we become aware that those dimensions are nothing less than the reflection of our sensation. [...] the value of this study is to be able to develop an awareness of other dimensions, by studying and manoeuvring the dynamic line.⁴⁶

Ginna discusses the possibility of further dimensions in space and attempts to prove that, despite the fact we are able to see only three dimensions, it is possible to have the perception of infinite space. The analysis of Futurist writings across the whole Futurist era demonstrates the attention that artists and writers paid to the idea and method of science. The outcome of their very speculative arguments is probably not very significant, but what is relevant in the context of this investigation is a recognition of the extent to which the power of suggestion generated by scientific theories, in which space was the main component, were elaborated and how they informed the Futurist artistic discourse in the period.

Although Lino Cappuccio positioned himself in a different theoretical position in relation to the development of Futurism in the 1930s, he is nevertheless often positive in reference to some interpreters of *Aeropittura*. In his publication *Nuovo Futurismo* Cappuccio underlines the importance of science in the Futurist ideology, in particular not only in term of parallels and coincident research but also in the social role that they occupy. In particular, there is again the stress on the parallel between the role of scientist and artist and the need to merge the two roles. He states:

[The] essential function of the Futurist scientist is to be able to connect and bridge the gaps of the universe mysteries: being able to communicate the whole by enunciating two or three general laws that

⁴⁶ Arnaldo Ginna, "Scienza Futurista. Investigazioni sulle tre dimensioni", p. 5. "Investigando però le dimensioni rappresentate da linee ideali o dalle linee materiali di un oggetto noi ci accorgiamo che esse dimensioni non sono altro che il riflesso di una nostra sensazione. [...] l'utilità di questo studio è di poter sviluppare in coscienza di altre dimensioni, studiando e manovrando la linea dinamica".

the thousand operators of official science will take it upon themselves to analyse meticulously.⁴⁷

It is hard to find a clear reference to Einstein's Relativity theory in early Futurism but the situation changes in the 1930s. Fillia is one of the main exponents of Aeropittura up until the mid-1930s.⁴⁸ He shows his interest in the new discoveries when he says:

Thanks to Gauss, Reinmann, Kobatchewsky, the mathematical 'poets' Poincaré and Einstein dared to consider a space that our senses cannot know. In this way our universe becomes hypothetical, based on extraordinary laws with geometries of more than three dimensions.⁴⁹

The fact that in the 1930s the discourse developed in order to find a connection between the principles of the fourth dimension with Einstein's new relativity theory is explained by Enzo Benedetto in an issue of *Futurismo-Oggi* in 1988. In this publication Benedetto discusses the notion of the fourth dimension in Boccioni's art and then proceeds by including the relativity theory:

Boccioni made a distinction between the absolute motion (the intrinsic movement of the object) and the relative motion (the movement of the object in relation to the motion of other objects that interfere). Many years later, Marinetti, on the occasion of the presentation of Aeropittura's manifesto, following the same concept of the relative motion expressed by Boccioni, hypothesised a relationship between the aerial and terrestrial motion. To me, it seems that, by assimilating the notions of Einstein's general relativity, it is possible to give substance to the relationship between universal dynamism and the fourth dimension.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Lino Cappuccio, "La scienza Futurista", *Nuovo Futurismo*, 30 May 1934, p. 4. "Compito essenziale dello scienziato Futurista è quello di lanciare immensi ponti attraverso l'abisso dei misteri dell'universo: dar l'idea di tutto, enunciando due o tre leggi di massima che i diecimila infusori della scienza ufficiale si incaricheranno di analizzare minuziosamente".

⁴⁸ This confirms the problematic chronology underlined by Henderson.

⁴⁹ Silvia Evangelisti ed. *Fillia e l'avanguardia Futurista negli anni del Fascismo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1986), p. 3. "Grazie a Gauss, Reimann, Lobatchewsky, i poeti matematici Poincaré ed Einstein osarono considerare uno spazio che i nostri sensi non possono conoscere [...] A questo punto il nostro universo diventa ipotetico basato su leggi straordinari con geometrie di più di tre dimensioni".

⁵⁰ Enzo Benedetto, *Futurismo-Oggi*, January-April, 1.4, 1988, p. 26. "Boccioni aveva distinto tra moto assoluto (il moto intrinseco dell'oggetto) e moto relativo (il moto dell'oggetto in relazione al moto di altri oggetti che interferiscano). Marinetti molti anni dopo in occasione del manifesto dell'aeropittura, seguendo lo stesso

The interest of Aeropittura in Einstein's relativity theory was also later recognised by the artist Lucio Fontana in 1950s. In 1946 he signed the first *Manifesto dello Spazialismo* in which he acknowledges his legacy with Aeropittura's theory of space. Occasionally, he appropriated titles of 1930s Futurist works such as *Concetto spaziale*, originally conceived by Fillia in 1930s. In reference to his spatial approach to the canvas he claimed: "I made a hole in the canvas to suggest the expanse of cosmic space that Einstein had discovered. Light and infinity pass through these holes; there is no need to paint".⁵¹ Scientific discoveries such as electromagnetic waves were mentioned by Marinetti in his article "Qualitative Imaginative Futurist Mathematics" in which he talks about the forces-lines in reference to the electromagnetic fields.⁵² Domenico Pietropaolo confirms the connection with the idea of force-line and scientific developments:

Although original as an aesthetic concept, the force-lines of Futurism are the product of a culture that was heavily conditioned by science. Force-lines are the Futurist equivalent of the physicist's lines of force, first introduced by Michael Faraday to explain the operation of electric and magnetic forces.⁵³

Evangelista reinforces the idea of a strong influence of science in later Futurism when she claims how "the expanding universe, the study of non-Euclidean spaces by Reinmann, the enlargement of astronomic research due to modern telescopes and the possibility of seeing bodies fluctuating in the atmosphere through scientific development" had to constitute an

concetto del moto relativo Boccioniano, fa l'ipotesi del rapporto tra il moto di un aereo e il moto della terra. A me è sembrato intanto che assimilando le nozioni di relatività generale di Einstein si può concretizzare la relazione del dinamismo universale con il normale epiteto di 'quarta dimensione'".

⁵¹ Gamwell, p. 275.

⁵² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti with Marcello Puma and Pino Masnata, "Qualitative Imaginative Futurist Mathematics", June 1941 in *Futurism: An Anthology*, pp. 298-301.

⁵³ Domenico Pietropaolo, "Science and Aesthetics of Geometric Splendour in Italian Futurism" in Günter Berghaus ed. *Futurism and the Technological Imagination* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 50.

unmistakable source of inspiration for the artists involved in Aeropittura.⁵⁴ While Boccioni and the other artists active in the first period were influenced by the concepts of the fourth dimension and the general idea of enlargement of space, in the 1930s Aeropittura's reference to an ever-changing expanded space also became a predominant motif due to the practice of flight. In the catalogue of the recent Futurist exhibition *Futurismo 1909-2009* Giovanni Lista cites the article "I fondamenti scientifici dell'Aeropittura futurista" in which Marcello Poma analyses the scientific space of Aeropittura and in particular the different movement of the gaze in space, the complete disappearance of perspective and the constant renegotiation of the horizon-line.⁵⁵ The article clearly illustrates the origin of the new language in Aeropittura and is traceable in the visual possibility offered by flight as a new experience of space.

From above, the airplane draws a spiral and vortex: the eye of the spectator who is in the plane, is subjected to a extremely fast whirling of the point of view, the scattered houses in the countryside appear to multiply and create whirling all around. Due to these complex optical-physiological sensations, the few houses in the landscape are in fact filling the entire picture.⁵⁶

Imagining Flight

The attempt to represent in painting the suggestive sensation and experience of flight is a genre that did not clearly originate with Modernism. In *Dream of Flight*, Clive Hart analyses documents and materials from 1250 to 1600 that illustrate the extent to which the aspiration

⁵⁴ Evangelista, p. 15. "Il concepire un universo in espansione, lo studio degli spazi non euclidei di Reimann, l'ampliamento della ricerca astronomica grazie ai moderni telescopi, il poter pensare – con l'appoggio della scienza al fluttuare dei corpi nell'atmosfera".

⁵⁵ Lista and Masoero, *Futurismo 1909-2009*, p. 239. First published as Marcello Poma, "I fondamenti scientifici dell'Aeropittura Futurista", *Vita Nuova*, XIV, 11, November 1937, Rome, pp.1-2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 239. "Dall'alto, l'aeroplano disegna una spirale a vortice: per l'occhio dell'osservatore che, trovandosi a bordo, è soggetto a un rapidissimo turbinio del punto di vista, le case sparse nella campagna sembrano moltiplicarsi e formare dei vortici tutt'intorno. A causa di queste complesse sensazioni ottico-psicologiche le poche case del paesaggio si trovano a riempire tutto il dipinto".

to fly has informed art for millennia.⁵⁷ Since the first drawing of a mythological flying creature and the improbable attempt to produce an instrument that allowed man to undertake the same enterprise, human imagination has not desisted from indulging in its dream of reaching the sky. Every kind of odd machine was experimented with, including different types of parachute, kites and even winged attachments strapped to the body. A more coherent theorisation was elaborated by Leonardo Da Vinci with his drawings of *Flying Machines* in the fifteenth century. The studies of Leonardo's sketches demonstrate that he was fascinated with the idea of flight itself rather than in creating a viable machine. Even in the 1930s when the airplane was already successfully tested, several articles published in *Futurismo* envisaged a whole range of implausible new flying machines.⁵⁸ In the simplest terms, flying has also been considered a metaphor for freedom and evasion and the symbolization of the extension of boundaries in the creative process. In Freud's psychoanalysis the dream of flight always symbolises a form of lack in the real life or a desire unsatisfied. The terms freedom, evasion and liberation often appear in a discourse on spatial theories and the fourth dimension. Henderson explains that a desire of freedom and liberation is often at the origin of the artist's engagement with the fourth dimension:

Like non-Euclidean geometry, the fourth dimension was primarily a symbol of liberation for artists. However, the notion of a higher spatial dimension lent itself to painterly applications far more easily than did the principles of non-Euclidean geometry. [...] The late nineteenth-century resurgence of idealist philosophy provided further support for painters to proclaim the existence of a higher, four-dimensional reality, which artists alone could intuit and reveal.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Clive Hart, *Dream of Flight: Aeronautics from Classical Times to the Renaissance* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1972).

⁵⁸ "Invenzioni e scoperte geniali", *Futurismo*, 15 May 1932, p. 10 (author not given); Leonardo Algardi, "I tentativi e gli esperimenti per il volo autonomo dell'uomo", *Futurismo*, 1 January, 1933, p. 5.

⁵⁹ Henderson, p. 340.

The social context in which the members of Aeropittura developed their interest and passion in flight is a very productive field of investigation. The airplane was considered the symbol of the age by the intellectuals and artists within Aeropittura's circle. For example the artist Tullio Crali stated:

Every age had its lifestyle and atmosphere of dynamic expansion determined by discoveries, inventions, revolutions and conquest. Thus also the age that we are proud of living in and shaping has got its unmistakable and marked feature: the mechanical conquest of the air until the sound of velocity and the glacial altitudes of the stratosphere has made it possible that our intellectual (mental) and emotional faculties tended towards the dynamic elements that was since antiquity a coveted and until now, inviolate ambition.⁶⁰

The artists' praise and celebration of the machine and its possibilities finds its social counterpart in the general attitude towards aviation at that time. The flight across the Atlantic by the pilot Italo Balbo in 1932 excited the minds of the artists. Even before the period preceding Balbo's enterprise the general public showed an infatuation with airplanes and the crowd often manifested their pride in the large-scale improvement of Italian aviation. Although only a small elite had in effect the opportunity to fly, a real *aeromania* seized every social class in Italy. As Bonsegale explains the upper class was interested in aviation because of the expensive and elitist characteristics of this new technology, the middle class and industry saw in the new means the possibility to increase their profit in terms of commercial trading; the political class, especially the Fascists, used aviation as a way to exalt Italian engineering and the power of aviation as an efficient weapon in the war.⁶¹ The other social

⁶⁰ Tullio Crali in Bruno Mantura and Patrizia Rosazza Ferraris, *Mostra dell'aria e della sua conquista* (Rome: De Luca, 1989), p. 13. "Ogni epoca ha avuto il proprio tenore di vita e la propria atmosfera d'espansione dinamica determinati da scoperte, invenzioni e conquiste. Così anche quest'epoca che noi abbiamo l'orgoglio di vivere e di forgiare ha un suo carattere spiccato e inconfondibile: la conquista meccanica dell'aria sino alla velocità sonora e alle glaciali altitudini della stratosfera ha fatto sì che le nostre facoltà mentali e sentimentali si orientassero verso questo elemento che fine dall'antichità fu meta agognata e sino ad oggi inviolate".

⁶¹ Giovanna Bonsegale, "L'estetica del volo" in *Volare!: Futurismo, aviomania, tecnica e cultura italiana del volo: 1903-1940* (Rome: De Luca, 2003), p. 169.

class, Bonsegale carries on, was affected by this *aeromania* mainly because of their desire for emulation and identification.

For Italians by 1935 the relationship between their dynamic new regime and aeronautical prominence was something they took for granted: during more than a decade it had been drummed into them by means of words, images and spectacular demonstrations staged throughout the world. For Italians, Fascism was synonymous with flight.⁶²

Robert Wohl, in his detailed study of the development of Italian aviation, describes the raising of Balbo's role in politics as a consequence of his popularity as a pilot and the propagandist and rhetorical use that was made of Italian aviation. Balbo, a pilot with relatively little experience in the field, was first promoted Marshal of the Air and subsequently Governor of Libya in 1933. He was not the only Italian aviation hero: prior to Balbo's endeavour the charismatic figure of the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio and his flight enterprises enflamed the minds of the Italians. Wohl also describes the vital role of the figure of Mussolini who attempted to embody the power and modernity of flight. As early as 1919, Mussolini expressed his strong interest and faith in flight, which may appear to foresee the propagandistic use of aviation in the years to come:

To fly! Always higher, in a prodigious tension of nerves, of will, of intelligence that only that little mortal body of man can give. To fly above all the petty struggles of this terrible, continuous trench that is present-day life.

To Fly! To fly for the beauty of flight, almost art for the sake of art – to fly so that tomorrow the collectivity possesses a new instrument which will render easier, more rapid and more frequent intellectual, moral and commercial relations among the most distant people.⁶³

⁶² Robert Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 51.

⁶³ Wohl, p. 61.

In the light of the events of Second World War in which aerial warfare played a significant role, Mussolini's faith in the power of aeronautics acquires a very sinister nature which contributes towards an understanding of the persistent critical reception of Aeropittura as a mere visual response to the Fascist ideology. In the essay "*Il Primo Pilota: Mussolini's Fascist Aeronautical Symbolism and Imperial Rome*", Gerald Silk explains that, in 1930s Italian society, Roman symbols were merged with the imagery of modern aviation to combine the greatness of past and present.⁶⁴ This visual language was overtly employed in 1934 in Milan where the *Esposizione aeronautica* organised at the Palazzo Reale became an incredible success. Artists such as Mario Sironi, Edoardo Persico, Giò Ponti, Luciano Balderssarri and Bruno Munari contributed to the event and the photographer and pilot Filippo Masoero provided the majority of the aerial photographs shown at the exhibition. The goal of the show was to demonstrate the avant-garde nature of the Italian aviation with a similar approach to the one deployed for the *Mostra della rivoluzione Fascista* and "to break down the barrier between the spectator and the objects on display by creating environments that would give the visitor the sensation of participating actively".⁶⁵ Even in this case, the scenographical façade of the exhibition contributed to set the tone of the event:

The façade has been transformed in order to offer a synthesis of the content of the exhibition to the spectator. The composition is dominated by an intensely blue surface. On this vivacious sky the *fascio littorio* that is positioned on a globe protects and strengthens the flight formation of silver airplanes. At night, the composition is illuminated: the letter of the sign and the airplanes stand out against a glow of white light, while the transparent *fascio* is lit up with an alternation of white, red and green light.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Gerald Silk, "*Il Primo Pilota: Mussolini's Fascist Aeronautical Symbolism and Imperial Rome*" in *Donatello Among the Blackshirts*, pp. 67-81.

⁶⁵ Whol, p.103.

⁶⁶ *Guida della esposizione aeronautica italiana* (Milan: Edizioni d'Arte Emilio Bestetti, [after 1934]) No pages [Section 1: "La Facciata"]. "La facciata principale è stata trasformata in modo da offrire al visitatore una sintesi immediata del contenuto della mostra. La composizione è dominata da una larga superficie intensamente azzurra. Su questo cielo vivacissimo si distacca il fascio littorio poggiante sul mondo e la sua sagoma protegge e potenzia il volo di uno stormo di veivoli d'argento. Di notte la composizione è illuminata: le lettere della scritta

The façade was adapted in order to offer a synthesis of the content of the exhibition to the spectator and the other topics of the show concerned the different techniques surrounding aviation such as cartography, aerodynamics, meteorology, mechanical engineering and the most functional style for the architecture of airports. The exhibition contained relics of airplanes, images and celebration of famous flights and aeronautical enterprises, but it also proposed a translation of aviation imagery into a poetic language. In one of the rooms was displayed the message in a rather unconventional language: "A new aspect of the world is now open to our wonder. At the price of the sublime danger, powerful eyes observe everything from the sky. Splendour of lights, flashings, seas, fugacious apparition of earth are the preys of the precise and fast device".⁶⁷ An introductory part of the show was dedicated to showing how fascination with flight has always characterised the development of the human being since antiquity. Aviation was not limited to the sphere of technology, military or strategic planning but it had to permeate every aspect of cultural and artistic life. However the interest generated by the development of aviation and the suggestion and fascination that derived from the new powerful flying machine were part of a more extensive European feeling:

Its cultural impact was ultimately defined by deeply rooted values associated with the up-down axis. Low suggests immorality, vulgarity, poverty and deceit. High is the direction of growth and hope, the source of light, the heavenly abode of angels and gods. From Ovid to Shelley the soaring bird was a symbol of freedom. People were divided in their response to flying: some hailed it as another great technological liberation and some foresaw its destructive potential.⁶⁸

e i veivoli risaltano contro un alone di luce bianca, mentre il grande fascio trasparente si accende di luce alternata bianca rossa e verde".

⁶⁷*Esposizione dell'aeronautica italiana*. exh.cat. Milan (Palazzo dell'Arte), 1934, p. 217. "Un aspetto nuovo del mondo si è rivelato alla nostra meraviglia. Al prezzo sublime del rischio occhi possenti guardano le cose dal cielo. Splendore di luci, scintillio, di mari, fugace apparire di terre sono la preda dell'ordigno esatto e veloce".

⁶⁸ Kern, p. 241.

The cultural impact of aviation on a broader geographical area demonstrates how it could be too reductive to interpret the fascination of the Futurists with flight only as a consequence of contemporary politics. Kern described the success of some aviation contests in France and the passion for aviation generated by some personal records or enterprises, like the general public's enthusiastic response when the French pilot Louis Blériot crossed the English Channel in 1909. Occasionally, the literary language translates the mundane constituent of technology into a poetic theme as Proust's reaction to the contemplation of airplanes in the sky conveys:

The airplanes which a few hours earlier I had seen, like insects, as brown dots upon the surface of the blue evening, now passed like luminous fire-ships through the darkness of the night....And perhaps the greatest impression of beauty that these human shooting stars made us feel came simply from their forcing us to look at the sky, towards which normally we so seldom raise our eyes.⁶⁹

The suggestion of flight and aviation allowed artists and writers to push the boundaries and to imagine exploring an alternative world and interplanetary flight. The 1930s was a golden age of science fiction and saw the emergence of writers such as Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, and Arthur C. Clarke all of whom remained influential for a generation to come. Although at the beginning of the previous century the Russian scientist Konstantin E. Tsiolkovsky theorized the possibility of space flight, it was in the 1930s that the first experiments for space flight were carried out by the American Robert Goddard.

Although the Futurists had engaged with the idea of flight since the publication of the first manifesto in 1909 it was not until the 1930s that they fully developed their aesthetic relating to flight and the aerial dimension. If the general public was excited by the appearance of airplanes in the sky, this was not enough for the Futurist artists who called themselves

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 245.

aeropittori. They wanted to participate in the spectacle of aviation, experience the aerial dimension and artistically represent the new space. The airplane was the means of the physical enlargement of space. In their time they felt closer than ever to the experience of immensity that poets and artists had dreamed of for generations.

Manifesto of Aeropittura

The Manifesto of Aeropittura was published in 1929 and was signed by Balla, Benedetta, Depero, Dottori, Fillia, Marinetti, Prampolini, Somenzi, and Tato.⁷⁰ There are, however, some doubts about both the authorship and the original content of the document. In a letter to the painter Gerardo Dottori, Mino Somenzi claims authorship of the document and accuses Marinetti of radically changing his theories. He complains to Dottori:

Let's be honest: that Manifesto has been created by me and it's time that everyone knows that. Marinetti only published a summary but he took off perhaps the most important part: the one that demonstrates that Aeropittura that I have conceived (after long months of study) does not have anything to do with Prampolini's claims, the alleged Azari's ideas and with the exhibitions that have been organised in Italia in the last period.⁷¹

Duranti in his essays "Genesi e interpretazioni del manifesto dell'Aeropittura" explains how, in a rare 1929 article entitled "Prospettive di volo e Aeropittura" Marinetti makes a reference to the manifesto attributing some form of authorship to Mino Somenzi.⁷² However as Durante explains, on other occasions Marinetti acknowledges Somenzi only in terms of a generic first

⁷⁰ First published in *Gazzetta del Popolo* (22/09/1929).

⁷¹ Letter by Somenzi addressed to Dottori, Somenzi Collection, Som. III.2.6 (MART Archive). "Parliamoci chiaro: quel manifesto è stato creato da me ed è ora che si sappia. Marinetti si è limitato a pubblicare un riassunto togliendo al lavoro forse la parte più importante: la parte che dimostra come l'Aeropittura che ho ideata (dopo lunghi mesi di studio) non abbia nulla in comune con le rivendicazioni di Prampolini, con le presunte idee di Azari e con le mostre che hanno fatto il giro d'Italia in quest'ultimo tempo".

⁷² Massimo Durante, "Genesi e interpretazioni del manifesto dell'Aeropittura", in Enrico Crispolti and Franco Sborgi eds. *Futurismo: i grandi temi, 1909-1944* (Milan: Mazzotta, c1997, stampa 1998).

conception of a manifesto of Aeropittura rather than the full authorship. The first reason for Somenzi's complaints concerns the foundation of his approach and in particular the necessity for the artist to fly in order to perceive the new space. The comparison between the two different versions of the manifesto may provide some issues for discussion. The original manifesto is not a description of a new way of painting but an attempt to demonstrate scientifically the new point of view, the effects and emotions that the new aerial perspective could offer. In line with the general interest of Futurism in scientific methods, he summarises his theories in a mathematical formula:

My plates practically demonstrate how the aerial perspective (solution of geometric problems), added to the elements of atmosphere (b) and velocity(c) make a determined sensation (x) clear and logical, in relationship with the creativity of the artist (z) in the same way as $a+b+c \cdot z=x$ ⁷³

Duranti explains with these words Somenzi's theory on the new perception of space: "It is therefore theorized the annulment of time and the ample transfiguration of time and space, of the existing matter and the elevation of sensibility and multiplication of sensations".⁷⁴

The Futurists published dozens of manifestos, some of which explained artistic practices already in existence. The manifesto of Aeropittura does not possess the violence, aggression, hyperbole and parody of some of the other manifestos.⁷⁵ Fillia himself, in his discussion of the differences between the first and the second Futurist moment, states that in the second period they abandoned the rhetorical and polemic tone.

⁷³ Som. III.2.6 (MART Archive). "Le mie tavole dimostrano appunto, praticamente, come la prospettiva aerea (soluzione dei problemi geometrici) aggiunta agli elementi atmosfera – velocità renda precisa, chiara, logica una determinate sensazione in rapporto alla fantasia dell'artista così come $a + b + c \cdot z=x$ ".

⁷⁴ Duranti, p. 217. "Si teorizza dunque l'annullamento e l'ampia trasfigurazione del tempo e dello spazio, dell'esistente, con elevazione della sensibilità e moltiplicazione delle sensazioni."

⁷⁵ For further details on Futurist manifestos see Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) and Umbro Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973).

These last twenty years of work have created in the young generations a conscience in harmony with its own time – the triumph of the Futurist principles have reduced the need of that theoretical intransigence that was necessary in the hostile pre-war environment.⁷⁶

The manifesto opens with a list of previous works exemplary of Aeropittura's language among which appears *Prospettive di volo* by Fedele Azari, dated 1926 (Figure 2). As the title suggests, the work depicts a deformed view of an urban space observed from above. The colours are artificial and the image seems to illustrate an urban night view illuminated by electric lights, which constitutes a recurrent motif in the works of the first period by Boccioni, Balla and Carrà. The manifesto provides a list of nine points to describe the effect of flight on visual perception. The first point states that "the changing perspective of flight constitutes an absolutely new reality, one that has nothing in common with the reality traditionally constituted by earthbound perspectives".⁷⁷ The artists highlighted the innovative nature of the view from an airplane and the new reality that can be perceived through the means of flight. However, the innovative nature of this new way of seeing is questionable. Vision from above and the depiction of space from a bird's eye view is not a Futurist invention. In different historical periods, artists and cartographers provided images of the earth and cities from an aerial perspective. Giovanni Lista claims that the theme of sky and cosmic space emerged from the fundamental historical principles of the humanist culture, Platonism and the catholic spirituality.⁷⁸ He traces the history of the aerial vision of the city drawing a parallel between the very traditions of Italian art and the Futurist aeropainters. The bird's-eye view

⁷⁶ Fillia, "Il Paesaggio nella pittura futurista", *Oggi e Domani*, I, n. 18, Rome, 18 August, 1930, p. 5. "Questi vent'anni di lavoro hanno creato nelle generazioni giovani una coscienza in armonia col proprio tempo – il trionfo dei principi Futuristi hanno attenuato il bisogno di quell'intransigenza polemica che era necessaria nell'ambiente ostile dell'anteguerra".

⁷⁷ "Le prospettive mutevoli del volo costituiscono una realtà assolutamente nuova e che nulla ha di comune con la realtà tradizionalmente costituita dalle prospettive terrestri".

⁷⁸ Giovanni Lista, "Vue aérienne et Aéropeinture Futuriste: Une métaphysique de l'espace" in Chrystelle Desbordes and Nakov Andréi eds. *La conquête de l'air. Un aventure dans l'art du XX siècle*. exh.cat. Toulouse, 2002.

representation of the medieval city was a way to propose and popularise a political and social programme that could find a later counterpart in the origin of perspective in the Renaissance period as a cultural apparatus. The perception and the artistic representation of space and its surrounding can convey a particular social view or political agenda. According to Lista:

Aeropittura had two main branches, representing two visions of the aerial, one physical, the other mental. The physical vision took the form of looking downward from above and was concerned with direct illustration of the dematerializing effect of the aerial view. The mental vision was based on looking upward from below and represented an attempt to put into images the physic experience of the conquest of space and symbolic mythology.⁷⁹

The dualistic nature of Aeropittura space composed of mental and physical nature argued by Lista introduces a very interesting and innovative component into the interpretation of Aeropittura that deserves further analysis. Conventionally, Aeropittura is divided into two main strains: a representation of a cosmic and abstract world identifiable in the works of Fillia and Prampolini and an 'indulgent' figurative production characteristic of artists such as Tullio Crali, Tato and Alfredo Ambrosi. While the latter has usually been dismissed in a chorus of negative criticism as a naïve over-figurative production, the work of Fillia and Prampolini has sporadically stimulated a more positive debate. This sub-categorisation of Aeropittura is perhaps a synthesis of Marinetti's partition of the movement into four pictorial strands such as cosmic, documentary, mystic, and lyric. The documentary Aeropittura is evidently related to the reproduction of terrestrial space from above and aerial perspective described as "a synthetic, documentary Aeropittura, dynamic of landscapes and urbanisms seen from above. The major artistic interpreters are Tato and Ambrosi".⁸⁰ The graphic and

⁷⁹ Giovanni Lista, "The Cosmos as Finitude from Boccioni's Chromogony to Fontana's Spatial Art" in Jean Clair ed. *Cosmos: from Romanticism to the Avant-garde*, exh. cat. London, 1999, p. 181.

⁸⁰ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Mostra Futurista di Aeropittori e Aeroscultori" in *III Quadriennale d'arte nazionale*, exh. cat. Rome (Palazzo delle Esposizioni), 1939, p. 185. "Un'aeropittura sintetica documentaria dinamica di paesaggi e urbanismi visti dall'alto e in velocità. Ne sono esponenti maggiori Tato e Ambrosi."

figurative nature of this production has caused these works to be dismissed as “mere depiction of propellers and airplanes”.⁸¹ By doing so, the aesthetic principles behind the representation of aerial space defined in the Aeropittura manifesto have also been discarded. The artists themselves claimed that Aeropittura did not mean to paint airplanes or new figurative elements such as propellers, airplanes and atmosphere. As Crali states, “Aeropittura is not the representation of airplanes and aerial landscapes as often believed; it is the painting of air, painting of space”.⁸² A painting of that kind would have been just the substitution of apples and pears of the still life with another object, as some artists mentioned repeatedly. Massimo Bontempelli, an Italian writer, is sharply ironic about the propensity of Aeropittura to include the airplane and overtly reference the machine in painting.⁸³ He states that every age could have their machine to praise but this has got nothing to do with a valid poetic either in art or literature. To some extent, the Futurists shared his opinion. Fillia in an article in 1931 states:

There are not possibilities to trace the aspects of airplanes in flight, of the landscapes and the states of mind of the aviator. The shapes of the airplanes, of the skies, of the earth, of the sidereal worlds are organised beyond all visual logic and every interpenetration of planes caused by the movement. They are constructed to convey the idea of man in front of the spirit of mechanical nature.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Crispolti, *Il secondo Futurismo*, p. 46.

⁸² Tullio Crali, “Tullio Crali: L’Aeropittura. La parola ai protagonisti”. *M-G* 5, 1971, [P. 2]. “Aeropittura non è raffigurazione d’aeroplani e panorami aeri come spesso si crede: è pittura dello spazio, pittura dell’aria”.

⁸³ Massimo Bontempelli, “Altro che macchine” in Isabella Gherarducci ed. *Il Futurismo italiano: materiali e testimonianze critiche* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1984), pp. 196-198.

⁸⁴ Fillia, “Spiritualità aerea”, *Oggi e Domani*, I, n.18, Rome, 18 August 1930, p. 5. “Nessuna possibilità di rintracciare gli aspetti dell’aeroplano in volo, dei paesaggi e dello stato d’animo dell’aviatore. Le forme degli aeroplani, dei cieli, della terra, dei mondi siderali, si organizzano al di fuori di ogni logica visiva e di ogni compenetrazione di piani causata dal movimento. Si costruiscono per rendere l’idea dell’uomo di fronte allo spirito della natura meccanica”.

The *Manifesto tecnico dell'Aeroplastica Futurista*, first published on 1st March 1934, reinforces the role of vision and physical experience as the origin of Aeropittura.⁸⁵ The cinepanoramic view described in the document entitles an over-comprehensive visual perception, a union with matter and a total experience of aerial space. The artists encourage an artistic production that could include not only a new form of visual perception, but also a physical contact with matter and immersion of space.

Vision: Perception and Dominance

Vision, whether aerial or terrestrial, presupposes a certain distance from what constitutes the actual object of looking. As Paul Virilio explains in *The Vision Machine* "the bulk of what I see is in fact and principle no longer within my reach".⁸⁶ The artists were able to perceive visually the terrestrial space because they positioned themselves at a distance. Occasionally, the experience of vision resulted in an abstract and synthesised depiction of space while, in other episodes of Aeropittura production, the artistic result is the sort of documentary painting described by Marinetti.

In *Il volo su Vienna* (Figure 6 - Flight Over Vienna, 1933), Alfredo Ambrosi translated into painting a real event from a photographic recording of the famous flight over Vienna that took place in 1918. On 9th August of that year seven airplanes flew over Vienna and dropped 50,000 leaflets written by D'Annunzio in Italian and 350,000 written by Ugo Ojetti and translated into German. The flight was demonstrative and propagandist and no material damage to the city was inflicted. The leaflet contained a rhetorical celebration of the Italian army and aimed to convince the Viennese to desist in their fight. The event had a great

⁸⁵ Bruno Munari, Carlo Manzoni, Gelindo Furlan, Ricas, Regina, "Manifesto Tecnico dell'Aeroplastica Futurista", *Sant'Elia*, 1 March, 1934, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 7.

resonance in Italy and it was considered an extraordinary success despite the military irrelevance of the action. An entire room was dedicated to this event in the aeronautical exhibition in 1934 which also contained one of the airplanes used for the enterprise. The success of the work is testified by a brief publication entitled *Il volo su Vienna. Principali giudizi della stampa* (1936) which not only contained some very enthusiastic reviews but also listed the different cities in Europe where the work was exhibited.⁸⁷ Moreover, according to an article published in *Sant'Elia* the work was the first Futurist painting purchased by the king for his collection.

The well justified delight of Ambrosi is also our pleasure because the painting, that has always and everywhere attracted universal consensus, was presented by us the first time at the *Grande Mostra Futurista* solemnly inaugurated by Marinetti in Mantua as part of the *Settimana Mantovana* in 1933-XI. Since then *Il Volo su Vienna* has been moved to the Galleria Pesaro in Milan and then Rome at the first national exhibition organised by Futurism where the painting became one of the major attractions.⁸⁸

Eight years earlier in 1925 the artist Mario Sironi gave his interpretation of the event in a work also entitled *Il volo su Vienna* (Figure 7). Sironi concentrates on the theme of the airplane, the means through which the message was delivered. It does not seem to refer to a particular action and there is not any reference to the surrounding space or the city. Vienna is only present in the title. The execution is sketchy and the colours are unnatural: the aerial space surrounding the airplane is rendered in a brown tone instead of the more obvious blue. The artist is not concerned to communicate the dynamism or the narrative of the action. On the other hand, Ambrosi includes the shape of the plane in the work and he figuratively

⁸⁷ Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Budapest, Athens etc.

⁸⁸ "Il volo su Vienna di A.G. Ambrosi acquistato da S.M. Il Re", *Sant'Elia*, III. n. 65, 15 April 1934. "La ben giustificata gioia di Ambrosi è anche la nostra gioia perché il quadro, che ha sempre ed ovunque raccolto la totalità dei consensi, fu da noi presentato per la prima volta alla Grande Mostra Futurista inaugurata solennemente a Mantova da S.E. Marinetti in occasione della Settimana Mantovana del 1933-XI. Da qui il Volo su Vienna passò alla Galleria Pesaro di Milano, donde fu trasferito a Rome, alla Prima Mostra Nazionale organizzata da 'Futurismo' dove costituì una delle maggiori attrattive".

‘presses’ the airplane into the urban space with the result that its form seems to shape the geography of the territory. The tricolour on the leaflets is clearly illustrated in four different groups in the shape of a triangle located in different areas of the painting. The landscape is geometrically divided into different sections and occasionally the rigidity of the geometry is softened by the insertion of curvilinear shapes representing natural elements such as clouds and water. In the 1918 photograph from which Ambrosi drew inspiration, the leaflets are present in the image as a concentration of white spots in the centre of the picture representing a bird’s eye view of the city of Vienna.

Despite the importance attributed to each artist’s personal experience of flight, the use of an aerial photograph as a source of inspiration was not uncommon in Aeropittura. The pilot and photographer Filippo Masoero produced a fairly substantial amount of photographs that were then translated into paintings or used as a source of inspiration, as his displays at the aeronautical exhibition in 1934 demonstrates. Lista in *Cinema and fotografia Futurista* identifies Masoero as a main interpreter of the dynamic vision theorized by the Futurists.⁸⁹ The photographer created blurred and out of focus images of urban views like in *Veduta aerea dinamizzata del Foro Romano* (Figure 8 - Dynamic Aerial View of the Roman Forum, 1930). Lista points out that this form of urban representation constituted a significant break from De Chirico’s views of city as ‘fossils of history’ and Masoero “seized the panorama of Italian cities in a vibrant and accelerated vision that, as an immediate seismography of the vital experience, can be described as a photographic version of action painting”.⁹⁰ Ambrosi’s *Il volo su Vienna*, unlike the photograph, aims to convey a great deal of information in reference to the action such as the means and types of airplane, the nationality, the tricolour on the leaflet; all details that the original photograph did not contain. Ambrosi

⁸⁹ Giovanni Lista, *Cinema e fotografia Futurista* (Milan: Skira, 2001), pp. 227-230.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 230.

proposes his own geography, perception of the territory, his own map and recording of the event. Geography was mentioned by Marinetti in reference to the work of his wife and artist Benedetta in the series of work she produced for the *Palazzo delle Poste* in Palermo. In “Benedetta e l'Aeropittura geografica”, published in *Stile Futurista*, Marinetti describes with an extravagant language the work of his wife:

Benedetta conceives a completely new type of Aeropittura which I define as geographic. Given a sufficient space, the painter is able to define convincingly a whole series of antithetical proportions and distances as well as a series of dynamisms between the distances, with interpenetrations and simultaneities expressive of a ‘spherical and terrestrial feeling’.⁹¹

Aerial perspective has often been associated with rationalisation of space and the scientific representation of terrestrial geography resulting in the achievements of cartography. Maps and the practice of mapping itself have been examined in reference to different chronological artistic practices. The importance of the cartographical tradition for art practices has been explored by many art historians. For example Stephen Bann has discussed the key role of maps in authenticating and reproducing artistic journeys in Land Art⁹² while Wystan Curnow has examined the function of maps in Conceptual art in “generating new forms of thinking and feeling about space”.⁹³ In more detailed analysis, Svetlana Alpers in her work on Dutch painting and their ‘impulse to mapping’, explores the significance of mapping for Dutch artists and the interchange between maps, cartography and art in the seventeenth century. Alpers highlights the fact that maps were not an objective representation of physical space

⁹¹ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Benedetta e l'Aeropittura geografica”, *Stile Futurista*, 4 October 1934, p. 26. “Benedetta realizza un tipo di aeropittura assolutamente nuova, che chiamo geografica. Dato uno spazio ampio, la pittrice riesce a fissare in modo probante una serie di antitesi di proporzioni e distanze e una serie di dinamismi tra le distanze con compenetrazioni e simultaneità espressive di uno stato d'animo sferico terrestre”.

⁹² Stephen Bann, “The Map as Index of the Real: Land Art and the Authentication of Travel”, *Imago Mundi*, vol. 46, 1994, pp. 9-18.

⁹³ Wystan Curnow, “Mapping and the Expanded Field of Contemporary Art” in Denis Cosgrove ed. *Mappings* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990).

but conceptual representations of space achieved through a processes of rationalization.⁹⁴ In particular by producing maps it was possible to convey an extensive range of knowledge and information about the world, “maps were referred to as glasses to bring objects before eyes” and “allowed to see what was invisible”.⁹⁵ By mapping a territory, visual selection on the space represented is exerted and the thematic maps could constitute an extreme example of this selection. The decision about what to eliminate or emphasize was largely determined by the use, the context and the intention of the cartographer. In the 1930s, maps constantly appear in posters produced by Italian artists to celebrate aviation enterprises such as *Crociera aerea transatlantica* (Figure 11 – Transatlantic Aerial Cruise, 1931) or for advertising purposes (Figure 10 - *Il Bel Canavese*, The Beautiful Canavese, 1930).

In the Aeronautical Exhibition mentioned above, cartography, maps and aero-photography had a very prominent role. The section in the exhibition entitled *Mostra di aerocartografia e aerofotografia* was physically divided into two parts that included photographs and maps with a description of the different techniques and perspectives used in surveying and mapping, the presentation of new devices such as a new *apparecchio fotografico aerouniversale* that was supposed to be a new instrument for the automatic tracking of maps; probably a sort of rudimentary satellite and also a section on bibliography and press. Section 29 of the exhibition guide describes this project and the form of new documents called “aero-photo-perspectives” obtained by taking photographs of airplanes in flight, clouds, smoke, mountains, plains, cities and monuments, in Italy and in the colonial territories. A series of aerial surveys and maps of Vienna, described as being taken during D’Annunzio’s flight celebrated in *Il volo su Vienna* by Ambrosi were displayed on the right hand wall in the room dedicated to cartography is showed. Interestingly, some of the sections in the exhibition

⁹⁴ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 119-168.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

occupied ambiguous positions between being a presentation of art production or the result of scientific and technological surveys. This is something that surely appealed to the Futurists.

In the papier-colle *Viaggio* (Figure 9 - Travel, 1933), Bruno Munari adopts a constructivist language to convey the idea of travel. In his composition, maps of two Italian islands, an African Island and the scale box referring to the maps are alternated with a series of geometrical forms. However, the maps have different scale so the presence of this interpreting tool is more deceiving than illuminating. On the bottom right Munari inserts a cut of an envelope that includes a stamp and a graphic shape of an airplane and in other areas of the picture, it is possible to observe a reproduction of a building and a ship in black and white. Unlike Munari, Ambrosi does not deploy a real map in his work. However his reading of the terrestrial space reproduced in the photography is more than just a naïve attempt to represent airplanes and aerial views. His translation of the event into an artistic vocabulary is an attempt to convey specific information about that event and his choice of what was important to maintain and what needed to be eliminated. The painting is also emblematic of his personal view of the dynamic, decomposed and multi-perspectival characteristics of the space experienced by the pilots who participated in that demonstrative action. The personal translation of the physical and geographical features of the territory is illustrated in other works such as *Volo romantico* (Figure 12 - Romantic Flight, 1932) by Cesare Andreoni and *Diavolerie di eliche* (Figure 13 - Devilments of Propellers, 1936) and *Paesaggio aereo* (Figure 15 - Aerial Landscape, 1932) by Tato where the representation of the terrestrial space acquired the aesthetic characteristic of cartography. In both case the artists seem to reference a form of physical maps in which, in the case of Andreoni, the stylized shape of an airplane becomes part of the environment in which the suggestion of natural features is emphasized by the deployment of earthly colours. On the other hand, Tato placed the airplane at the centre of the scene, relegating the representation of the geography to the background. By favouring a

prominent figurative representation of the machine he contradicts the aesthetic principle of the Aeropittura manifesto and both the airplane and the landscape are subjected to an even higher viewpoint. Once again, the territory and the geography are translated into a personal perception and interpretation of what constitutes the main features of the territory below. In the work by Mario Molinari, *Il golfo di Hammamet. Liricismo topografico* (Figure 16 - The Hammamet Gulf. Topographical Lyricism, 1938), the reference to a scientific form of representation of the territory is evident from the title and the painting resembles later images resulting from satellite representation of the earth. On the left the sky and the sea are merged in an encompassing blue in which sky and water become unified substance, while on the coast the different greens and browns aim to describe the diverse natural surroundings. There is no reference to the human presence or any other landmark that could confirm the geographical location defined by the title.

Alpers states that capturing and reproducing a space on a surface can be indicated as a form of appropriation of the image represented even if only for a brief moment. The notion of appropriating space through its reproduction could convert the representation into an expression of dominance and authority.⁹⁶ In the leaflet produced by Ojetti it was stated that although they were only flying over Vienna, they could have dropped bombs instead. In other words: we could have killed you but, because we are in control, we are dropping leaflets instead of bombs. The action could be interpreted as a demonstration of the power to control life and death in which the physical spatial position becomes the space of power and Ambrosi's work, the symbolic power of space is enunciated. The notion of power in reference to a representation of space can once again being connected to the role of maps:

⁹⁶ In the film *Roma, Città Aperta* (1945) the Nazi officer in charge of capturing and torturing the partisans is never shown in an outside space, he never leaves his office and he is shown exercising his power on the urban territory through photographs and maps of the city. See David Forgacs, *Rome Open City* (Roma città aperta) (London: BFI Publishing, 2000).

Cartography too can be a form of knowledge and a form of power. [...] Whether a map is produced under the banner of cartographic science or whether it is an overt propaganda exercise, it cannot escape involvement in the process by which power is deployed. Some of the practical implications of maps may also fall into the category of what Foucault has defined as acts of 'surveillance' notably those connected with warfare, political propaganda, boundary making or the preservation of law and order.⁹⁷

Moreover, Ambrosi provides his own reading of the geography transforming the aerial view into an extremely geometrical landscape where the focus becomes the shape of the airplane in the centre. By doing this the artist is involuntarily replicating one of the structures of mapping connected with cartographical representation. J.B. Harley argues that "the geometrical structure of maps is an element which can magnify the political impact of an image even where no conscious distortion is intended".⁹⁸ The 'positional enhancing geometry', the effortlessly directed perception of the territory and centric view contributed to project a particular image and construction of reality. By depicting the event Ambrosi attempts to symbolise control over the territory exerted by flight and, though this analysis does not challenge the role of this work in a political discourse, a more sophisticated deployment of space and artistic practices begins to emerge. The threatening nature of flight was made manifest in aerial bombing particularly during the Second World War. Kern mentions the science fiction novel *The War in the Air* by H.G.Wells (1907) in which the author imagined a massive destruction as a consequence of aerial bombing. However, Kern explains that "when war came in 1914 it did not bring the rain of fire and destruction that many predicted. There was some aerial bombing, but airplanes were used largely for reconnaissance and to direct

⁹⁷ J.B. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge and Power" in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels eds. *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 279.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 289-290.

artillery fire”.⁹⁹ A few years later, the fear anticipated by Wells found a tragic reification in the massacre of Guernica and Dresden.

Moreover, in order to exist in its physical terms, the aerial space necessitates the two constituent dimensions- high and low. By theorising a division of space into the high and low dimensions, the higher ‘partition’ defines itself as the powerful and controlling spatial sphere. In the essay “The Force of Flight” published in 1973 to accompany a series of paintings by Paul Rebeyrolle, Michel Foucault expresses the inherent dimension of power that characterised the ‘high’ space by saying that “in the world of prisons as the world of dogs (lying down and upright), the vertical is not one of the dimensions of space, it is the dimension of power. It dominates, rises up, threatens and flattens”.¹⁰⁰ In her study of Soviet space, Katerina Clark analyses the symbolisation of power and dominance inherent in the spatial hierarchy.

....that valorised spatial binary, high low, was to become central in the metaphorical system of Stalinist culture. This spatial hierarchy informs the choices of many of the symbolic heroes who were foreground in the rhetoric and ritual of the thirties, such as aviation heroes, who were said to go “ever higher”, mountain climbers and even virtuoso violinist whose notes were said to go higher than those of lesser performers.¹⁰¹

The reference to high and low is very much present in many Aeropittura works included in the conventional category of documentary and figurative. For example, works such as *Me ne frego e vado su* (Figure 14 - I Don't Care and I'm Going Up, 1936), *Navigazione ascensionale* (Figure 17 - Upward Navigation, 1933) and *Velocità* (Figure 18 - Speed, 1936) openly celebrate the vertical and ascensional movement already from the titles. By inserting diagonal

⁹⁹ Kern, p. 246.

¹⁰⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Force of Flight” in Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden eds. *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, c2007), p. 170.

¹⁰¹ Katerina Clark, “Socialist Realism and the Sacralizing of Space” in Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman eds. *The Landscape of Stalinism: the Art and Ideology of Soviet Space* (London: University of Washington Press, 2003), p. 8.

straight lines that run through the low section of the canvas and are directed towards the upper area of the canvas the artists the artists Tato and Mino Delle Site illustrate the movement and attraction towards a higher dimension of space. The shape of an airplane itself is sometimes included in the lower section of the painting, almost to suggest that the artist is positioned on an even higher physical level and therefore possesses the more inclusive form of panoptic vision of the terrestrial geography described by Foucault in his studies.¹⁰² While in *Me ne frego e vado su* by Tato the machine is predominant in the representation, Mino delle Site, through the deployment of abstract forms and unrealistic colours, avoids any anecdotal reference and, instead, attempts to convey the impression of an upward and rapid movement. Despite the fact that this production has been often considered of questionable quality, it becomes evident that the works explored so far are more than mere figurative reference to the airplanes and can be included in a more sophisticated discourse on perception and representation of space in Futurist art.

Physical Appropriation of Space and the Sublime Fall

The empowerment of vision through an elevated viewpoint also implies an analysis of the supposed lower and perhaps negative dimension of space. However, although being on a lower position implies subservience to the power exerted by the higher dimension, it also provides an alternative experience of space. Michel de Certeau in his essay “Walking in the City” compares two alternative perceptions of the urban space in New York City.¹⁰³ The viewpoint from the World Trade Centre detaches the observer from any physical and experiential participation of the events that he or she is witnessing. The panoptical vision described by de Certeau involves a vaster although less accurate vision where the feeling of

¹⁰² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

¹⁰³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

control is the protagonist. Alternatively the experience of walking in the city implies a physical and sensorial involvement. Walking in the city is considered by de Certeau a form of enunciation and creation of space. Through flight and the reproduction of aerial space in painting, the Aeropittura artists communicated their elevated position in reference to terrestrial space and the power exerted on the territory. However, the physical experience is the starting point of the artists' creation process. As the manifesto explains, the artists had physically to experience aerial space before approaching the canvas in which both the double movement of the painter in space and the hand of the artist could generate the work of art. The physical occupation of space through flight can be interpreted as a different level of experience of the aerial dimension. The physical engagement experienced by walking in the city rescales and subordinates the primary role of vision in the aerial view. If in Aeropittura vision occupies the main role in the representation of aerial views and terrestrial geography, experiencing the aerial space means a shift from a process of looking to a bodily perception of space. The condition of being immersed in space will then be reproduced in paint, rather than the image observed from a point in the distance. In the same way that representing an object can be considered as a form of appropriation, the physical occupation of a space is itself a form of legitimation and control. Le Corbusier in *The New World of Space* states:

Taking possession of space is the first gesture of living things, of man and of animals, of plants and of clouds a fundamental manifestation of equilibrium and of duration. The occupation of space is the first proof of existence. Architecture, sculpture and painting are specifically dependent on space, bound to the necessity of controlling space, each by its own appropriate means.¹⁰⁴

By asserting their primacy in appropriating the aerial space, the Futurists justified and legitimated their existence as artists in a period in which their artistic and cultural

¹⁰⁴ Le Corbusier, *New World of Space* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1948), p. 7.

environment barely tolerated them. This idea of conquest and appropriation of space is overtly present in the titles of works such as *La conquista dello spazio* (Figure 19 - The Conquest of Space, 1932) by Pippo Oriani or *Conquista spaziale* (Figure 20 - Spatial Conquest, 1933) by Augusto Ciacelli. The appropriation and control of space is here presented with a different artistic vocabulary in comparison with the very figurative works by Ambrosi and Tato examined above. The window over an unexplored world of space is opened in the work the *Conquista dello spazio* in which Oriani in an unreal atmosphere depicts the new elevated frontiers and boundaries reached through flight. A similar experience is represented in *Conquiste siderali* (Figure 21 - Sidereal Conquests, 1931) in which the artist, through the juxtaposition of a few basic figures and forms, attempts to describe new spatial enterprises, not limited to our atmosphere but aiming to reach new 'sidereal' spaces.¹⁰⁵ A different approach is adopted by Ciacelli in *Conquista spaziale* in which the artist does not attempt to represent an outer space. Instead the aspiration seems to convey the effect that the enlargement of boundaries can produce on the human body and mind. The canvas is mainly covered with warm auburn and amber colours in which it is possible to recognise the shape of a human head and a flash of lightning. The human presence is not precisely delineated and all the elements represented are merged in an over encompassing and dynamic atmosphere. The notion of the expansion of spatial boundaries and new conquest in space is also a constant factor in the artists' writings. Fillia in the essay "Spiritualità aerea" describes Aeropittura as the inevitable orientation of art towards the physical conquest of the sky. Artists sought to reach unexplored space in their continuous stretching of the vertical dimension.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ The word *siderale* is commonly used in the Italian language to describe something related or pertaining the stars and constellations.

¹⁰⁶ Fillia, "Spiritualità aerea", *Oggi e Domani*, Rome, 4 November 1930, p. 5.

However, the idea of ascension has been part of every culture in every period of time. By looking at the sky, humankind has always tried to invoke mysterious forces and to find responses, attracted and frightened by this immensity. The possibility of possession of the sky and immensity could also be connected with a form of terror.

Flight becomes a kind of catharsis: perfect turning over the ascension. Fall takes the place of ascension and transforms in darkness the dream and imagination of the sky that we are supposed to aspire. Fall is the quintessence of obscurity, it is the human anguish in front of temporality. Life itself has been originated from this: the birth is the first fall in life, in temporality¹⁰⁷

Although in the artists' writings flight is always discussed deploying highly celebratory tones, when the manifesto describes the aerial landscape it points out that the different sections of the landscape appear temporary and as if they have just fallen from the sky: "to the painter in flight all parts of the landscape appear: squashed, artificial, provisional, just fallen from the sky".¹⁰⁸ The idea of fall and consequent death represents the fearful side of that feeling of immensity that man could experience through flight. Foucault in another description of Rebeyrolle's paintings states:

The bird, like power, comes from high. It beats down against the force that also comes from high, and which it wants to *master*. But, in the moment it approaches this terrestrial force, yet livelier and more burning than the sun, it breaks down and falls, dislocated.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Maria Fratelli and Fabio Fornasari, "Navis-aerea. Spazio-tempo-relatività" in *Volare!: Futurismo, aviomania, tecnica e cultura italiana del volo: 1903-1940* (Rome: De Luca, 2003), p. 275. "Il volo diventa catamorfico: ribaltamento perfetto dell'ascensione. La caduta prende il posto dell'ascensione e trasporta verso l'oscuro i sogni e l'immaginazione di quel cielo a cui aspirare. La caduta è la quintessenza delle tenebre, è l'angoscia umana davanti alla temporalità. La vita stessa vi ha origine: la prima esperienza, il parto è la prima caduta nella vita, nella temporalità".

¹⁰⁸ "Tutte le parti del paesaggio appaiono al pittore in volo: schiacciate, artificiali, provvisorie, appena cadute dal cielo".

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, p. 171.

Throughout history a fascination with flight developed alongside the symbol of the fall. Judith Bernstock describes how modern art is populated by a constant reference to mythology in which the figure of Icarus seems to be predominant.

Twentieth-century artists have also been inspired by Icarus, who died following his escape with his father, Daedalus, from Minos's Crete. The images of Icarus flying close to the sun, which melted the wax on his wings, and his subsequent fall into the sea, continue to have a broad humanistic appeal for modern artists.¹¹⁰

Although de Certeau is not directly referring to the idea of fall and death in his discourse on the different perception of urban space, he compares the experience of falling back into the crowd after the ecstasy of altitude as an Icarian fall. While the aerial view is perceived as the 'ecstasy of reading such a cosmos' and 'a voluptuous pleasure of seeing the whole' the return to the terrestrial space is considered as a form of fall and death. The theme of death in Marinetti's 1909 manifesto has been extensively examined in scholarly literature.¹¹¹ The motorcar accident considered at the origin of the Manifesto has been interpreted as a sort of catharsis. Marinetti was reborn in a communion with the machine, and the closeness to death inspired him to write the foundation document of Futurism.

O maternal ditch, almost full of muddy water! Fair factory drain! I gulped down your nourishing sludge; and I remembered the blessed black beast of my Sudanese nurse... When I came up—torn, filthy, and stinking—from under the capsized car, I felt the white-hot iron of joy deliciously pass through my heart!¹¹²

Although Aeropittura's attitude towards flight is mainly celebratory, in some works this enthusiastic and positive praise of the technological means is absent. Angelo Caviglioni's

¹¹⁰ Judith E Bernstock, "Classical Mythology in Twentieth-Century Art: An Overview of a Humanistic Approach", *Artibus et Historiae*, IRSA, 1/1993, pp.153-183.

¹¹¹ Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (London: The Mit Press, 2004); Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)", *Modernism/Modernity*, 6.1, January 1999, pp. 1-49.

¹¹² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Futurist Manifesto*, 1909.

Aerei sulla città (Figure 22 - Airplanes over the City, 1929) and Sante Monachesi's *Acrobazie aeree* (Figure 23 - Aerial Acrobatics, c.1930) and *Aeropittura con fabbrica* (Figure 24 - Aeropittura with Factory, c.1930s) the theme of flight is illustrated in a more oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere. The colours are gloomy and the forms not clearly defined. The ambiguous direction of the machine seems more representative of an imminent fall rather than the triumphant ascension towards the altitudes. As described in the title, Caviglioni's work supposedly represents an urban scene that includes an airplane. As a consequence of the general blurred effect of the painting, the city space is not clearly identifiable, and it is unclear whether the scene is observed from an aerial point of view or from the ground. Instead, the artist positioned the viewpoint on a lower location and the airplanes, situated somewhere in the aerial space, seem to point towards the ground. The scene could describe an aerial bombing; however, the entire landscape avoids any realistic reference. Apart from the easily recognisable airplanes, the scene described is improbable: the shades of brown and yellow encompass every component in the work, the airplanes are far too close to the ground and their position is more suggestive of an imminent crash rather than the technological force of flight. The vertical element in the centre of the picture divides the scene into two separate sections, conferring solidity and immobility to the representation. Despite the figurative reference to the machine, the work is far from the precise delineation proposed in the documentary production of *Aeropittura*. Although there is no evidence that the artists Caviglioni or Monachesi were attempting to convey a negative interpretation of flight and they never openly engaged with the fearful side of the aerial experience, the proximity to death must have crossed their minds, all the more so considering that Marinetti himself was not reluctant in expressing similar feelings in the manifesto. Exaltation and terror are two faces of the dangerous situation described by Marinetti in reference to his car crash and here the danger inherent in the experience of flight is even more poignant.

The overwhelming experience of flight and the proximity to death generated a feeling that seems to be reminiscent of Edmund Burke's description of the sublime. In his enquiry, the sublime is described as "the passion which belongs to self-preservation" and these passions "are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances".¹¹³ Flight in its essence is a constant oscillation between the danger of the fall and ecstasy, due the close proximity to the altitude of the sky. Many Futurist painters physically experienced those ambivalent emotions and cathartic experiences. As Marinetti expresses in the manifesto in reference to the experience of danger, the fascination with the machine itself could generate a feeling similar to the sublime described by Burke. The definition 'technological sublime' is examined by Mario Costa in reference to the powerful magnificence and danger inherent in the perception of the machine.¹¹⁴ The machine and the metropolis took the place of nature as a new source of opportunities and wonder but also as terrorizing and alienating creatures.

A Pantheistic Approach to Nature

In Aeropittura's writings the notion of speed features as a key element of the type of flight that the artists celebrate. Simultaneity is identified in the manifesto as a fundamental characteristic of Futurist space:

Aeropittura finds its *raison d'être* in simultaneity. It is possible to avoid the dangers of the fragmentary of the details, and of the anecdotal. The landscape, the skies, the lights, the close, the distant, the past and the present appear in a unique block and the painter

¹¹³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), p. 66.

¹¹⁴ Mario Costa, *Il sublime tecnologico* (Salerno: Einaudi, 1998).

provides a simultaneous vision enriched by his states of mind
[soul].¹¹⁵

As a consequence of speed, artists attempted to enlarge the geographical boundaries of space. As Virilio reports, the physicist Ernst Mach, in a discourse on aerodynamics, stated that “The boundaries between things are disappearing, the subject and the world are no longer separate”.¹¹⁶ In the Manifesto of Aeropittura the artists describe the several ways in which aerial speed can affect vision and the extent to which these proved to be different from terrestrial speed:

...with earthbound speeds (horse, motorcar, train) vegetation, houses etc. rushing at us, the near ones turning very rapidly, far ones less rapidly, form a dynamic wheel in the frame of the horizons of mountains seas, hills, lakes, which also move, but so slowly as to seem still. [...] This continuity and this panoramic frame are missing from air speeds. The airplane, which glides, dives, soars etc., creates an ideal hypersensitive viewpoint suspended everywhere in the infinite, made even more dynamic by the very knowledge of the motion which changes the value and the rhythm of the minutes and second vision-sensation.¹¹⁷

The aerial speed praised by the Futurists in their manifesto affected the way they approached the representation of the landscape. In general terms, in the 1930s the Futurists manifested a renewed interest in the representation of natural landscape in opposition to the first Futurists who hardly ever engaged with the theme of nature.

¹¹⁵ Fillia, “Spiritualità aerea”, “L’aeropittura ha dunque la sua ragione d’essere nella simultaneità. Si evitano così i pericoli del frammento e del particolare e si esce dall’aneddotico. I paesaggi, i cieli, le luci, il lontano e il vicino, il passato e il raggiunto, risultano in blocco ed il pittore ne dà visione simultanea arricchita dei misteri del suo stato d’animo”.

¹¹⁶ Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 6.

¹¹⁷ *Manifesto dell’Aeropittura* (1929). “Nelle velocità terrestri (cavallo, automobile, treno) le piante, le case ecc., avventando contro di noi, girando rapidissime le vicine, meno rapide le lontane, formano una ruota dinamica nella cornice dell’orizzonte di montagne mare colline laghi, che si spostano anch’essa, ma così lentamente da sembrare ferma. Oltre questa cornice immobile esiste per l’occhio nostro anche la continuità orizzontale del piano su cui si corre. Nelle velocità aeree invece mancano questa continuità e quella cornice panoramica. L’aeroplano, che plana si tuffa s’impenna ecc., crea un ideale osservatorio ipersensibile appeso dovunque nell’infinito, dinamizzato inoltre dalla coscienza stessa del moto che muta il valore e il ritmo dei minuti e dei secondi di visione-sensazione.

Fillia himself recognises that there were differences between the artists of this period and the ones who were active in the first development of Futurism. In the essay “Il paesaggio nella pittura Futurista” he states: “The difference between the first Futurists and us is, of course, enormous: they were, as they defined themselves, the primitives of a new sensibility, we are the producers of a renewed sensibility with defined laws of order and equilibrium”.¹¹⁸ Although there is not continuity in the natural theme, the language and depiction of multi-perspectives seems to be a natural continuation of the plastic dynamism inaugurated by Boccioni in 1912. The interpenetration of fluid and organic forms, the merging between the object and its surrounding and the creation of space through movement are all characteristics that Aeropittura shares with Boccioni’s plastic dynamism. Prampolini in “Valori della plastica Futurista” explains how Aeropittura can be considered a recent contribution to the Futurist *plastica* that is constituted by a multi-centred representation and the expansion of forms in space.¹¹⁹ In works such as *Aeropittura* by Osvaldo Peruzzi (Figure 25 - 1934) and *Rombo di motori* (Figure 26 - Roar of the Engines, 1932) by Mino delle Site the technological themes is represented as an interpenetration of forms and colours. The pilot, with distinctive hat and glasses, is frontally depicted while in the background the expansive shape of an airplane appears to circle the surrounding elements. The dialectic articulation of colours creates a scheme that is reappraised everywhere in the painting where the separation between the different components of the scene is blurred. Similarly, in *Rombo di Motori* Mino delle Site creates a total spatial environment in which the different actions and objects are reciprocally dependent and indivisible.

¹¹⁸ Fillia, “Il paesaggio nella pittura Futurista”, *Oggi e Domani*, I, n. 18, Rome, 18 August 1930, p. 5 “Naturalmente tra primi Futuristi e noi la differenza è enorme, mentre quelli, per loro stessa definizione, erano i primitivi di una nuova sensibilità, noi siamo i realizzatori di una sensibilità rinnovata, con leggi d’ordine e di equilibrio definite”.

¹¹⁹ Enrico Prampolini, “Valori della plastica Futurista”, ms.476 (MART Archive).

Through their return to the landscape, Aeropittura reclaims its interest in nature. In “Realtà ed irrealtà” the artist Fortunato Depero described the passionate, naturalistic and pagan love for the surrounding space that informs his works.¹²⁰ The artists claimed not only to be interested in nature in its totality but also in the different elements that compose a landscape. The idea of nature was already explored in the early 1920s with “La flora Futurista ed equivalenti plastici di odori artificiali”¹²¹ by Fedele Azari. Nature was to be artificially (and futuristically) reconstructed as a subservient component of Futurist power. In the 1930s the attention shifted to a more complete perception of nature through the aerial view. Aeropittura includes an array of heterogeneous interpretations of the aerial landscape. Dottori in his *Manifesto Umbro dell’Aeropittura*, produced in 1941, describes how ideas derived from geography and the natural environment of Umbria, a region of central Italy, are enhanced by an aerial view and Aeropittura’s aesthetics rules. He explains:

An all encompassing Umbrian landscape spontaneously appeared to me and in my representation I force the spectator to position himself at the centre of the Aeropittura with me to dominate it and experience its totality and encircling roundness.¹²²

The celebration of nature in Dottori is rather atypical in Futurist production. The terrestrial and atmospheric elements are the main focus of his paintings in which the colourful landscape is often idealised and geometrically deformed. The sky is often symbolically suggested through the representation of the blue water of the lakes that Dottori includes in his landscapes. Light, which is a key feature in many Aeropittura works, constantly appears in Dottori’s artistic production. In some of his landscapes, such as *Aeropaesaggio* (Figure 27 -

¹²⁰ Fortunato Depero, “Realtà ed irrealtà”, Rovereto, 1931. ms.38 (MART Archive). Also published in Legione Trentina ed. *Fortunato Depero nelle opere e nella vita* (Trento: Temi, 1940), pp. 53-55.

¹²¹ Fedele Azari, *La flora Futurista ed equivalenti plastici di odori artificiali: Manifesto Futurista* (Milan: Direzione del Movimento Futurista, 1924).

¹²² “È nato spontaneo in me un paesaggio umbro circondante in cui costringo lo spettatore a mettersi idealmente con me al centro dell’aeropittura per dominarla e viverla nella sua rotondità totalitaria”.

Aero-landscape, 1932) and *Aurora volando* (Figure 28 - Dawn in Flight, 1933), the artist depicts intense sources of light that irradiate the landscapes. While the panorama is often produced through an alternation of fluid and curvilinear forms, the light that crosses and overpowers the image is geometrically constituted through a combination of straight and diagonal lines. The light can signify not only the atmospheric element but could be also the physical manifestation of the airplane in flight. This could explain the different geometry employed in the painting; fluid and organic for the natural landscape and geometric and overpowering for the machine. Aeropittura always proposes a simultaneous representation and a continuous interchange between the organic and the machine and therefore the prominent role reserved for the atmospheric light seems to represent more than just a celebration of the aerial phenomena. Alessandro Bruschetti's *Il fulmine* (Figure 29 - Lightning, 1932) and Marisa Mori's *Ballata aerea nella notte* (Figure 31 - Aerial Ballad in the Night, 1932), are two works in which a dark background is crossed by white strokes of lightning. The light illustrated in Mori's work symbolizes the presence of the machine during a night flight. However, the flashes of light that intersect in the centre of the painting, juxtaposed to the dark background presumably identifiable as a night sky, possess an almost celestial quality. Instead of describing the light as the technological sign and product of a perfect machine, the artist interprets the presence of the machine as an iridescent light resembling vision and a supernatural apparition. Rudolf Arnheim in his brief essay entitled "The Symbolism of Light" explains the symbolic power of light in art and culture and the extent to which light is, by its nature, perceived as a result of an action from above:

....performed by celestial powers dwelling above the human realm and exerting its awe-inspiring influences downward. An eternal lamp suspended in space presents us mortals with a reassuring promise. Since light is so powerfully visible but at the same time incorporeal

and unspecific, it readily offers the image of a God devoid of material embodiment.¹²³

The impact of the pantheistic celebration of nature and technology in Aeropittura is a contributing factor of the artists' interest in Futurist sacred painting and architecture in 1930s. As the Aeropittura manifesto at point 9 anticipated: "soon a new extraterrestrial spirituality will be achieved." This artistic production will be briefly examined in the next chapter in conjunction with an analysis of the Futurist architectural principles.

The Futurist aeropainters seem to draw inspiration from the pictorial convention of representing natural phenomena in art. The artists Bruschetti in works such as *Colline e nubi* (Figure 30 - Hills and Clouds, 1935) and *Acrobazia fra le nuvole* (Figure 32 - Acrobatics in the Clouds, 1934) and Tullio Crali in *Vite orizzontale* (Figure 33 - Roll, 1938) strategically insert the illustration of clouds in aerial view. While in Crali the landscape represented is clearly an urban space, Bruschetti illustrates a natural scene. Crali presents an aerial view of a city and in the centre a vortex of clouds and light symbolises the daring manoeuvring of an airplane. This crafty deployment of clouds allowed Crali to avoid a too simplistic visual reference to the machine, leaving the responsibility of discerning the presence of the technological means and its actions to the spectator. While *Vite orizzontale* is informed by a degree of realism, in *Colline e nubi* Bruschetti represents the natural themes in a more imaginative and rather playful language. Realism is not the aim of the representation; instead, the artists attempt to create some unique forms that could encompass both the aerial and terrestrial view. All the natural elements included in the painting are curvilinear shaped with the intention to create a harmonious sense of movement and dynamism. A sense of straight geometry is applied to the bright buildings grouped in different sections of the landscape. The

¹²³ Rudolf Arnheim, *The Split and the Structure: Twenty-Eight Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 79.

representation of clouds that occupy the top section of the work contribute to create a dialectic exchange between terrestrial elements (hills) and its aerial counterparts in the sky (clouds). In *Acrobazia fra le nuvole* the clouds are superimposed on the landscape preventing a clear perception of the ground, the swirls of the airplane echo the forms offered by the clouds, and in turn the landscape imitates the action that is taking place in the sky. There is no perspective and the depiction of clouds with their mystifying nature contributes to the disappearance of the single viewpoint. Hubert Damisch in *A Theory of Clouds* explores the use of the clouds as a pictorial strategy in Correggio's painting:

It is a theme that [...] contradicts the very idea of outline and delineation and through its relative insubstantiality constitutes a negation of the solidity, permanence, and identity that define shape. Bodies entwined in clouds defy the laws of gravity and likewise the principles of linear perspective.¹²⁴

Although the insertion of the feature of clouds in painting is discussed in a completely different historical context, this strategy belonging to the tradition of Italian art, is borrowed by Aeropittura in its representation of aerial views. As previously discussed, the Aeropittura artists were fascinated by the work of the Italian masters, in particular Giotto and 'the primitives', and regularly appropriated some of the artistic technical conventions of the past. The juxtaposition of the solidity of some natural features and the ephemeral aerial space inform the treatment of nature in Aeropittura. Benedetta, in her work *Aeropittura di un incontro con l'isola* (Figure 35 - Aeropainting of an Encounter with the Island, 1939), alternates and concurrently amalgamates the pronounced solidity and jagged outline of the mountains with the smooth appearance of the aerial space. Earthly colours and organic forms act together to form an ideal aerial/terrestrial scene. Occasionally, the representation of natural elements and landscape can be interpreted as a form of arcadia achieved through

¹²⁴ Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of Clouds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 15.

technological means. Elizabeth Cowling discussed the impact of classical references in Europe during the interwar period:

Perhaps the most potent myth of all of the Mediterranean world as Arcadia – an earthly paradise protected from the sordid materialism of the modern industrialised world, free from strife and tension, pagan not Christian, innocent not fallen, a place where a dreamed of harmony is still attainable.¹²⁵

In reference to Aeropittura, Christine Poggi identifies the interest in flight and aviation and the genesis of a spiritual vocabulary as symbolic of a desired evasion and escape from the disillusion of Fascist society.¹²⁶ A similar opinion is expressed by Berghaus when he claims that “flying was a metaphor for the evasion of reality. The sky became the unlimited realm of cosmic fantasies and offered a reprieve from a marginalised existence in the niches of the Fascist market”.¹²⁷ Although it is very tempting to embrace this interpretation, the artists in their writings do not provide any evidence to support this thesis. Rather they show their unreserved acceptance of the Fascist regime most of the time. However the atmosphere of an aerial arcadia and idealized world is often recreated by the artists. In *Paradiso perduto* (Figure 34 - Lost Paradise, 1932) Mino delle Site quotes the theme of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eve. This theme has always been part of any Italian art history text book, in particular in reference to the frescos by Masolino da Panicale and his pupil Masaccio created in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence in fifteenth century. Both Masolino and Masaccio painted the figures of Adam and Eve located in a specular position in the chapel. The contraposition between the new humanistic language deployed by Masaccio and the classic and late gothic style of Masolino has conventionally symbolised the transition

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Leger, De Chirico and the New Classicism 1910-1930* (Mustang: Tate Publishing, 1990), p. 12.

¹²⁶ Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism. The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: University Press, 2008), p. 265.

¹²⁷ Günter Berghaus, “Futurism and the Technological Imagination Poised Between Machine Cult and Machine Angst” in Günter Berghaus ed. *Futurism and the Technological Imagination* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), p. 32.

between the two worlds in the Italian Renaissance. There is no doubt that Mino Delle Site became aware of this theme at some point in his long artistic training, either during the five year at the *Liceo artistico* or the later period at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. In his lively composition, Delle Site represents the couple twined together on a flat background. The natural element is suggested through a succession of colourful layers composed of organic and geometric forms. A similar environment is recreated in *Oasi* (Figure 36 - Oasis, 1935) by Bruno Tano or *Cime arse di solitudine* (Figure 37 - Summits Parched by Solitude, 1936) by Benedetta where the moment is suspended in a dreamlike atmosphere where, in an interrupted time, the human and natural world reconcile in an enduring harmony. From the only word in the title, 'oasis', the main theme of the work is revealed. Tano describes a surreal world illustrated in the form of a floating island with planets, and other organic elements gravitating around it. A similar approach is evident in Benedetta's work where a suspended globe, surrounded by a rainbow of artificial colours, is populated by squared elements probably indicating some forms of dwelling. As is often the case, in this Aeropittura production, except for the cubic constructions, there is no sign to indicate human presence. Instead the outcome is a surreal atmosphere conveyed through a combination of nature and technology, geometric and fluid, naturalistic and artificial. As Simona Cigliana explains in her book on esoteric influences in the Futurist ideology, the idea of cosmic dynamism as the eternal movement that became fundamental for the Futurist aesthetic, forced man to find a harmonisation with the evolution's laws of the universe. This was considered the only way to pursue both spiritual and technological development.

Futurism [...] develops between apparently incompatible elements: aspiration to the absolute, idealism, advanced spatiality and modernism, grotesque and even goliardic realism, and sensuality.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico. Contributi per una storia dell'irrazionalismo italiano tra otto e novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2002), p. 208. "Su questi presupposti oltre che su una grande disinvoltura

However, an interest in nature informed different aspects of Italian culture in the 1930s. The Manifesto of *Naturismo* was published in 1934, followed by exhibitions and events including the *Mostra del Naturismo in Piemonte* in 1935. *Naturismo* advocates a perfecting of the human being through its relation with nature. The article and documents in support of this new tendency are often populated by execrable statements about pure race and superiority. Understandably, *Naturismo* rarely appeared in any analysis of the Futurist movement, being discarded as a form of propaganda related to the creation of the Italian Fascist superman. Although there is not a specific production in painting related to *Naturismo*, the artists planned some architectural works and installations for the exhibition and discussed the notion of *Naturismo* in several issues of the periodical *Stile Futurista*.¹²⁹ Crispolti in *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo* concentrates his brief analysis on the communicative strategies deployed in the exhibition.

They [Futurists] have utilised all the possibilities of *plastica murale*, applied to the illustration of the different themes, room by room, together with extensive interventions of writing, photography and oversize posters in an attempt of develop a communication that is characterised by a regular expositive rhythm, composed rather than aggressive.¹³⁰

The periodical *La Forza* became the ideological tool for the diffusion of the theories related to *Naturismo*.¹³¹ In 1935 Fillia signed the introductory article in which they explain how in

avanguardistica, si giustifica l'apertura a tutto orizzonte del Futurismo, il quale si destreggia tra coppie di opposte apparentemente incompatibili: tra aspirazione all'assoluto, idealismo, spazialità avveniristica e modernismo, realismo grottesco e persino goliardico, sensualità".

¹²⁹ *Stile Futurista*, 1, n. 4, October 1934; *Stile Futurista*, 2, n. 6-7, March 1935; *Stile Futurista*, 2, n. 11-12, September 1935.

¹³⁰ Crispolti, *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo*, p. 538. "Hanno utilizzato tutte le possibilità della plastica murale, applicata all'illustrazione dei singoli temi, sala per sala, assieme ad ampi interventi di scrittura e di fotografia e gigantografia, in uno sforzo appunto di comunicazione, raggiunta tuttavia ad un livello di ordinata cadenza espositiva, distensivo più che aggressivo".

¹³¹ Claudia Salaris, *Artecrazia: l'avanguardia Futurista negli anni del Fascismo* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1992), pp. 178-184.

the Futurist groups involved in *Naturismo* different tendencies can coexist and be regrouped under the umbrella of the federation in which they share similar basic principles, but they can have a freedom of movement.¹³² The goal of the periodical was to promulgate *Naturismo* theories that could be applied to art and architecture. The article underlines the importance of expanding bodily perceptions through that machine that was, however, originated by nature. The goal was to possess and perceive the world in its totality, a total aesthetic of the natural world. From an analysis of these theoretical and critical documents it is possible to get a sense of how the Futurists favoured a new approach to nature based on its communion with the machine; together they could expand human performances and perceptions. The artists' aim was to glorify the natural forces and a style of life intimately linked to the opportunities offered by nature. *Naturismo* also meant more attention to the style of life, diet, sport, nature in urban spaces, animals and the new aesthetics of the landscape, which were some of the themes explored throughout the fourteen rooms in the exhibition organised in 1935. The movement aimed to include doctors, engineers, architects, artists and scientists and the issue of *Stile Futurista* dedicated to the exhibition also included articles by doctors who illustrated in their essays the physical and social benefits of some of the theories presented in the exhibition. They also explain how the scientific discoveries impacted upon the process of elaboration of the *Naturismo*'s theories. Arnaldo Ginna in the periodical *Il Nuovo* discusses the development of physics in the study of nature and the resistance of the organic cells and the possible application for the improvement of health.¹³³ The ultimate aim was to combine science and the cult of the machine with a renewed interest in nature. By claiming that the machine was naturalised and made an integral part of nature the Futurists attempted to overcome the instinctive objection of the possible contradiction in their attitude to celebrate

¹³² Fillia, "La federazione Naturista-Futurista", *La Forza*, September-October 1935, p. 1.

¹³³ Arnaldo Ginna, "Primo convegno italiano Naturista", *Il Nuovo*, 25 September 1934, p. 1.

both nature and technology. Prampolini explains that “both the products of nature and art are two equal products, one of human genius and the other of terrestrial nature, that find a communal reason because they respond to the intimate ideal and material necessities of man”.¹³⁴ Francesco Pedrini in “Culto del rendimento” explains that “the obsession with efficiency and performance in the human being, perceived as only an instrument and not as a goal of development and progress has an unnatural premise: the crisis is the unfortunate result of social sophism”.¹³⁵ They see the *Naturismo* not as the negation of the machine but as a revision in which the machine must again occupy a central role.

In architecture, the new interest in nature caused a reconsideration and in a sense expansion of the very idea of the city. Architecture had to become more flexible in order to accommodate the insertion of natural elements and ‘aerial’ components. Alberto Sartoris in the article “Ritorniamo alla natura” published in *Sant’Elia* discussed the new role of nature in architecture:

The contemporary architecture carefully studies in their deep complexity all the aesthetic possibilities offered by the hills, valleys and green areas that link the different buildings of the modern urban conglomeration in a movement that despite being asymmetric is also regulated and planned. [...] [it is] an intimate union of nature and geometry, sudden vision over distant fabulous horizons, penetration of vegetation in the orthogonal volumes of modern architecture.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Enrico Prampolini, “Gli artisti per l’affermazione di un prodotto nazionale”, *Stile Futurista*, II, November 1935, p. 16. “...egualmente due prodotti, uno del genio umano e l’altro della natura terrestre che trovano una ragione comune in quanto rispondono sempre alle intime necessità ideali o materiali dell’uomo stesso”.

¹³⁵ Francesco Pedrini, “Culto del rendimento”, *La Forza*, 1, n. 1, 15 July 1935, p. 2. “Il culto del rendimento del materiale uomo, considerato solo come strumento e non anche come meta del progresso ha dunque una premessa innaturale: la crisi è stata la triste deduzione di sofisma sociale”.

¹³⁶ Alberto Sartoris, “Ritorniamo alla natura” in *Sant’Elia*, December 1933, 1, n. 5, p. 1. “Ed è per questo che l’architettura odierna studia attentamente nella loro profonda complessità, le possibilità estetiche delle colline, dei pendii, delle valli, delle spinate, delle zone erbose e delle pianate degli alberi i quali legano in un movimento asimetrico ma pur regolato i vari tipi di edifici delle agglomerazioni moderne. [...] Congiungimento intimo di natura e geometria, vedute improvvise sui lontani orizzonti favolosi, penetrazione delle vegetazioni nei volumi ortogonali dell’architettura moderna”.

At the same time the division between urban space and countryside became blurred. The architect Giuseppe Rosso explains that the architect operating within *Naturismo* must destroy the preconceived ideas that the city can have a well defined limit and a closed area in antithesis with the countryside.¹³⁷ Fillia in “Naturismo e arte” proposes a revaluation of the countryside and a new conception of urbanism where the machine becomes the natural complement for the development of the human being proposing “an urbanism that takes into account the countryside, that needs rapid communication with the small agricultural areas and wishes to allow the citizens to take advantage of the countryside as an everyday reality”.¹³⁸ It is important to remember how the revaluation and promotion of the countryside was an important aspect of the autocratic policy of the regime and that Mussolini considered large urban centres as a threat where leftists and the intellectual elite could flourish uncontrolled. Fillia also discussed how the theories of *Naturismo* were related to Futurist artistic production, showing how it is not only connected to the social order proposed by the regime. The idea of the natural landscape surfaced, probably for the first time, in the Futurist aesthetic:

Some significant examples are given in many Futurist works produced by Prampolini, Depero, Dottori, Fillia, Tato, Benedetta and Oriani. The landscape are not represented as a snapshot but interpreted in their ideal forces, spiritualising the lights, the forms of the mountains and hills, the organisation of the real and of the imagined [...] Futurist *Naturismo* is anti-contemplative, loves action and physical and mental heroism. The Futurists [...] are the only ones to create paintings, sculptures and poetry where the virgin forces of nature can live, regarding nature as everything that is active, vigorous, material and spiritual, including earth and machines.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Giuseppe Rosso, “La casa naturista”, *La Forza*, 1, n. 1, 15 July 1935, p. 4. “L’architetto naturista distrugge il preconcetto che la città abbia un limite ben definito e sia una cerchia chiusa in antitesi con la campagna”.

¹³⁸ Fillia, “Naturismo e arte”, *La Forza*, 1, n. 1, 15 July 1935, p. 5 “Un urbanismo che tiene conto della campagna, che vuole comunicazioni rapidissime con i piccoli centri agricoli, che intende mettere a disposizione dei cittadini la campagna stessa [...] come una realtà quotidiana”.

¹³⁹ Fillia, “Naturismo e arte”, “Degli esempi molto significativi ci sono dati da moltissime opere Futuriste di Prampolini, Depero, Dottori, Fillia, Tato, Benedetta, Oriani ecc: i paesaggi visti non come un’istantanea ma interpretati nelle loro forze ideali, spiritualizzando le luci, le forme delle montagne e delle colline,

In his speech entitled “Il paesaggio e l’estetica Futurista della macchina” delivered at the Lyceum in Florence in 1931, Marinetti explains how the new perception of the landscape is a direct consequence of the experience of flight that allows an “astonishing almost simultaneous succession of Italian landscapes”.¹⁴⁰ Marinetti identifies different forms of landscape that have been expressed both in literature and art. Although he recognises the value of the traditional representation of landscape, he claims that in his time they were finally experiencing a representation of landscape synthesised by speed and machine. The manifesto of *Aeropittura* is identified as the first ideological step towards this new aesthetic:

As Futurists, we are claiming that the principle of aerial perspectives and consequently the principle of *Aeropittura* is an incessant, a gradual multiplication of forms and colours with resilient *crescendo* and *diminuendo* that are intensified and sweep generating new gradations of forms and colours.¹⁴¹

Bodily and Mental Experience in *Aeropittura*

Naturismo underlines the equal importance assigned to the notion of nature, technology and body. The physical experience of space was vital not only in *Aeropittura* but throughout the whole Futurist trajectory. In the early period, Boccioni anticipated an aesthetic based on an intuitive and sensorial approach to art that could replace the intellectual process of creation. Synaesthesia was actively sought in the Futurist production. The multi-sensorial experience

l’organizzazione del reale e dell’immaginato. [...] Il naturismo Futurista è anticomtemplativo, ama l’azione e l’eroismo fisico e mentale. [...] I Futuristi, [...] sono i soli a dare pitture, sculture e poesie dove vivono veramente le forze vergini della natura, intendendo per natura tutto ciò che è attivo e sano, materiale e spirituale, dalla terra alle macchine”.

¹⁴⁰ F.T. Marinetti, “Il paesaggio e l’estetica Futurista della macchina”, Lyceum di Firenze, 21 January 1931 published in Luciano De Maria ed. *Teoria ed invenzione Futurista*, (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1968), p. 545. “...una stupefacente successione quasi simultanea di paesaggi italiani”.

¹⁴¹ “Noi Futuristi dichiariamo che il principio delle prospettive aeree e conseguentemente il principio dell’aeropittura è un’incessante e graduate moltiplicazione di forme e colori con dei crescendo e diminuendo elasticissimi che si intensificano o si spaziano partorendo nuove gradazioni di forme e colori”.

of space also included a physical perception of surrounding space. As mentioned before, in Aeropittura the physical experience of flight became indispensable in the process of artistic creation. Similarly, the artists had to physically experience aerial space before approaching the canvas. The double movement in space of the painter and the movement of the hand of the artist on the canvas had to inform the work of art. The first Futurists condemned the Renaissance perspective for being a result of a purely intellectual operation. In Gleizes's discussion on space in art he states that with the help of perspective, space can be expressed as an illusion on a flat surface. In Aeropittura the space represented is not mediated through a mental elaboration or a pictorial technique but, according to the artists, it is a physical experience mediated and made possible by the technological means. Despite the fact that the artists still celebrate the machine they advocate an image of a harmonious being that does not share the characteristic of mechanized creation anticipated by Marinetti. The human being recuperates a prominent role because of its inherent human characteristics, not because it acquires mechanical attributes. However, the obsession with the concept and appearance of the body in 1930s is also very much a consequence of the social and political context. Mussolini always attempted to convey an image of himself that was characterised by a youthful appearance, physical power and virility.

The Fascist imaginary is paradoxically obsessed with the body (whether of the individual, the state, the nation or the race) and with the regulation of the boundaries between it and other bodies: there is an effortless sliding from literal to metaphorical bodies and back again. It is an imaginary obsessed with control, cleansing and healing. It applies a medical or surgical rationale.¹⁴²

This general climate had perhaps an impact on the renewed interest in the idea of body that reappears in its physical attributes in painting. The result in Aeropittura is a more balanced

¹⁴² Jana Howlett and Rod Mengham eds. *The Violent Muse: Violence and the Artistic Imagination in Europe, 1910-1939* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 21.

relationship between the human being and the machine where the mechanical element itself acquired human characteristics. The first Futurists had no interest in representing the human body in painting and they rejected the theme of the nude. In their Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting (1910) point number four states:

Against the nude in painting, as nauseous and as tedious as adultery in literature. We wish to explain this last point. Nothing is *immoral* in our eyes; it is the monotony of the nude against which we fight. We are told that the subject is nothing and that everything lies in the manner of treating it. That is agreed; we too, admit that. But this truism, unimpeachable and absolute fifty years ago, is no longer so today with regard to the nude, since artists obsessed with the desire to expose the bodies of their mistresses have transformed the Salons into arrays of unwholesome flesh!

We have demanded, for ten years, the total suppression of the nude in painting.

The body in Aeropittura is not the relentless mechanized man of the *Forme uniche di continuità nello spazio* by Boccioni. The body is reproduced in an intimate and delicate atmosphere. Even the aviator, the powerful and brave pioneer of the aerial dimension, is depicted in the most contemplative images. In *Spiritualità dell'aviatore* (Figure 38 - Spirituality of the Aviator, 1929) by Fillia and *Il cuore del pilota* (Figure 39 - The Heart of the Pilot, 1933) by Mino delle Site the emphasis is focused on the interiority of the man. Poggi describes Fillia's work as a "loosely configured biomorphic shape set into a semi-transparent, tilted plane; his central aperture may be an attempt to visualize the idea that transcendent beings are simultaneously physically present and dematerialized, having permeable bodies with indeterminate or fluid boundaries".¹⁴³ In *Il cuore del pilota* the artist creates a geometrical shape of a human body in which the heart is described as a triangular shape connected to a section in the top right of the painting, probably to symbolise the yearning for higher dimensions of space. Every aspect of the intimate body of the aviator is

¹⁴³ Poggi, *Inventing Futurism*, p. 254.

now scrutinised. The sexuality of the aviator is often suggested by the illustration of their 'mistresses' such as in the sculpture *L'amante dell'aviatore* (Figure 40 - The Aviator's Mistress, 1936) by Regina. The feminine body also appears in painting in works such as *Femminilità* (Figure 41 - Femininity 1928), *Suonatrice* (Figure 42 - Musician 1929) and *Tendenze spirituali* (Figure 43 - Spiritual Tendencies, 1929) by Fillia or *Ritratto di Benedetta Marinetti* (Figure 44 - Portrait of Benedetta Marinetti, 1928) by Prampolini where the female physical attributes are emphasised to convey the seductive power of the woman's body. The shape of Benedetta's body, Marinetti's wife, occupies the entire space of the painting and it is superimposed on a colourful, multilayered background. While the body is mainly symbolised by its silhouette and filled with the background colours, some features are more delineated. The head is portrayed in profile with one eye and the mouth visually prominent. The pale left hand, with a finger pointing towards the bottom left of the painting, is graphically described and by means of an undulating black line, the artist successfully creates a movement that begins in the left shoulder and concludes in the movement of the hand. The left calf is created in a bright flesh tone and solidly anchored to the ground. Prampolini's deployment of colours and forms confer a vibrant but equally graceful quality upon the portrait of Benedetta.

However, despite this artistic production, even in the late writings, the artists still support some of the original Futurist ideas regarding the female body, ranging from the acquisition of mechanical attributes as a way to be functional to the complete outclassing of the woman in favour of the machine. In his controversial literary work entitled *Mafarka* published in 1909 by Marinetti, the protagonist generates a son without the intervention of the woman.¹⁴⁴ Fillia offers a similar view in some of his literature works such as *Il sesso di metallo* (1925), *Lussuria radioelettrica* (1925) and *La morte della donna* (1925). Nevertheless the body materialises in painting with sensual and tantalizing qualities. There is no trace of irony or

¹⁴⁴ F.T. Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist: an African Novel* (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998).

any form of derogatory attitude towards the representation of human attributes. The very organic, fluctuating, curvilinear forms are probably the closest representation of the nude produced by the Futurists over more than twenty years. Although in the 1930s the Futurists are not vocal about their treatment of the human body, this approach seems to be part of a return to nature and organic forms in which the idea of *Naturismo*, the interest in the landscape and human body, are all components.

The aesthetic approach to space in Aeropittura is based on two main strands: the visual perception of terrestrial space from a distance and an experiential physical appropriation of space achieved through immersion in aerial space. The sensations generated by the pantheistic experience of aerial space and the empowering feeling of control and dominance resulted in an enlarged vision could both be connected to the idea of the expanded and absolute space proposed by the scientific theories. In the previous paragraphs the analysis included Lista's interpretation of Aeropittura space in the two categories of physical and mental space. The discussion on the nature of Aeropittura space is key in this analysis. Was the space simply the result of a mental construction? Is the word intellectual more appropriate to describe the mental elaboration to which space is subjected in Aeropittura? On the other hand, can we consider the origin of spatiality depicted in Aeropittura as mainly visual and physical rather than intellectual or mental?

Works by Fillia, Prampolini, Oriani and Mino delle Site, have often been associated with the idea of mental space. These usually illustrated flat abstract forms, or alternatively a juxtaposition of geometrical forms in three dimensions in an often very uncanny and surreal atmosphere. Lista defines the cosmic idealism theorized by Prampolini as "the second way of research in Aeropittura, that of the contemplative eye that aims to translate, in image, the psychic experience of space conquest and its spiritual mythology and is simultaneously

liberated from the sensorial and any form of aerial vision".¹⁴⁵ In another catalogue this production is interpreted in reference to the airplane as "a means to acquire a new sense of vision and then develop a cosmic sensibility".¹⁴⁶ In 1960 Crispolti described the works of Fillia and Prampolini (the other artists are not really examined in his study) as an interior and psychological exploration "populated by alarming ghosts".¹⁴⁷ Crispolti explains this introversion with the "crisis of the positivistic pragmatism of the first Futurism" and associated this art with the very broad categories of Abstraction-Creation, metaphysical painting and Surrealism.¹⁴⁸ Conventionally any interpretation of Aeropittura has been informed by the notion of the translation of a physical space and a mental space into visual representation often without dwelling upon what a consideration of the mental and physical could have meant for the artists. This chapter has examined how vision and the concept of control and domination can be examined in conjunction with a physical experience and appropriation of space. These are two dimensions in which Aeropittura engages with the distant vision of territory and the physical immersion in aerial space. While a complete separation of these different spheres is unrealistic, ruling out the impact of vision in the 'cosmic' production of Aeropittura may be incorrect. Although this is not the appropriate context to engage in a philosophical discussion on the nature of mental space, it becomes immediately clear that we are in front of a very undefined concept. Lefebvre in his study points out how the inherent complexity of the expression 'mental space' has resulted in a multitude of definitions and occasionally misinterpretations:

¹⁴⁵ Lista, *Futurismo 1909-2009*, p. 242. "[Questa] seconda linea di ricerca dell'aeropittura, quella dell'occhio contemplativo che mira a tradurre in immagine l'esperienza psichica della conquista dello spazio e la sua mitologia spirituale, si libera contemporaneamente dal sensoriale e da ogni forma di visione aerea".

¹⁴⁶ Maurizio Scudiero, Gregory Alegi and Massimo Cirulli eds. *Oggi si vola: cent'anni di tecnica, sogni e cultura di massa. Manifesti, pitture e sculture aeronautiche del novecento italiano*. exh cat. Bologna, 2003, p. 25. "...un mezzo per acquisire un nuovo senso della visione quindi sviluppare una sensibilità cosmica".

¹⁴⁷ Crispolti, *Storia del Futurismo*, p. 264. "...popolate di fantasmi allarmanti".

¹⁴⁸ Crispolti, *Secondo Futurismo. 5 pittori + 1 scultore 1923-1938*, p. 38. "...crisi del positivismo pragmatista del primo Futurismo".

No limits at all have been set on the generalization of the concept of mental space: no clear account of it is ever given and, depending on the practical consistency, self-regulation and the relations of the parts to the whole, the endangering of like by like in a set of places, the logic of container versus contents and so on.¹⁴⁹

Given the complex nature of the definition of mental space, it is appropriate to approach this supposed 'mental space' in Aeropittura through the characteristics of artistic representation. The artists translated the immensity of space initially experienced through flight into the creation of cosmic and universal forms. It goes without saying that the very concepts of infinite and immensity are as problematic as the notion of mental space. As Arnheim effectively illustrates, the concept of immensity as an enlarged and infinite space finds its *raison d'être* in the very concept of confinement. Infinite space is itself a contradiction and dichotomy; it is an aspiration that needs to be constantly renegotiated with and by our senses. In this respect, Arnheim underlines the schizophrenic and frustrating effort of this endeavour:

The confinement gives the world a centre around which it can be pictured to expand. In doing so, however, we are depriving the world of its endlessness, the very property we are trying to grasp. In true endlessness there is no centre, the centre being everywhere and nowhere and there is no direction, since motion occurs in all directions at the same time. There is no orientation in infinite space and no difference between motion and stillness, no difference between largeness and smallness. Shipwrecked in the overwhelming immensity, we gratefully grabbed Newton's notion of absolute space and when it was no longer admissible we were rescued by Einstein's insistence on the absolute speed of light.¹⁵⁰

In this rather long quotation, Arnheim clearly underlines how grasping the infiniteness of space, and in the case of art, translating and reproducing it is an intrinsic contradiction.

¹⁴⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Arnheim, *The Split and the Structure*, p. 43.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard attempts to define whether the concept of immensity originates from an intellectual or an emotional process. He examines how different conditions of spatiality have been expressed in literature and he extensively analyses the origin of the feeling of immensity and the nature of the term vast. “it becomes clear that works of art are the ‘by-products’ of this existentialism of the imagining being. In this direction of daydream of immensity, the real product is consciousness of enlargement”.¹⁵¹ In his discussion of the idea of vastness and grandeur Bachelard uses the example of the immense quality of the forest: “If one wants to experience the forest this is an excellent way of saying that one is in the presence of immediate immensity, immediate immensity of its depth”.¹⁵² The forest and the inner immensity are described as “veiled for our eyes but transparent to action”.¹⁵³ According to Charles Baudelaire, the word vast is actualised when a day dream is touched by grandeur. Vast does not refer to a physical dimension but “actually this grandeur is most active in the realm of intimate space. For this grandeur does not come from the spectacle witnessed, but from the unfathomable depth of vast thoughts”.¹⁵⁴ However, he describes this thought of immensity not as a result of an intellectual experience but as a creative and emotional process in which a “mystic space is born of music meditation”.¹⁵⁵ In the description of the origin of thoughts of immensity Baudelaire refers to his immersion in the oneirism of the music of Wagner and Liszt:

I felt freed from the powers of gravity, and through memory, succeeded in recapturing the extraordinary voluptuousness that pervades high places. Involuntarily I pictured to myself the delightful state of a man in the grip of a long daydream, in absolute solitude, but a solitude with an immense horizon and widely diffused light; in other words, immensity with no other setting than itself.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 184.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

Bachelard describes this process as a phenomenology of extension, expansion and ecstasy that is not part of the physical world but the result of an intimate immensity. In the Aeropittura manifesto the artists refer to the concepts of grandeur and immensity in relation to aerial perspective. The artist has to aim to the greatest elevation and to aspire to go beyond 'the limit of the possible' and the landscape has to appear in its grandeur. Aeropittura works originate by the visual representation of a physical and real space experienced by the artists. The idealisation of flight and the possibility of reaching unexplored cosmic dimensions was a process of their imagination, therefore from some point of view, mental, as Lista states, but it was never intellectual. The feeling of immensity generated by that spatial experience is then translated into a pictorial vocabulary. It was a result of the participatory quality of their experience of space, in a pagan, pantheist and intuitive relation with reality and nature. As we have examined in Bachelard the feeling of immensity is a product of the vastness and grandeur in daydream. In the experience of Baudelaire this feeling was triggered by a very concrete experience of the music of Wagner and Liszt. The stimulation of the sense of hearing resulted in the elaboration of the feeling and sensation of vastness and immensity. In the case of Aeropittura the feeling of immensity originated with an experience of space in which both the bodily experience and vision played a vital part.

Synthesis and Symbolic Representation

Lista states how, in the cosmic production of Aeropittura, the image is liberated by the contingencies of vision. However, vision seems to be solidly connected even with this production of Aeropittura. The manifesto states: "painting this new reality from aloft imposes a profound contempt for detail and the necessity of transfiguring and synthesising

everything".¹⁵⁷ The artists claimed that the new aerial perspective had given them the opportunity to know and recreate a new world of 'multiperspectives' and synthesis. From above, the details are eliminated and everything is reduced to basic forms. This can be connected to a more general artistic trend in the period. Kern says:

Gertrude Stein speculated that the Cubists' break-up of the old ways of seeing was suggested by aerial vision, even though none of them had been up in a plane. The Cubist reduction of depth, elimination of unessential detail, composition with simplified forms, and unification of the entire picture surface are a pictorial representation of the view of the earth's surface from an airplane in flight.¹⁵⁸

The concept of synthesis regularly appears both in the titles of works and Futurist writings since the first years of the movement. *Sintesi di un paese* (Figure 45 - Sintesi of a Town, 1936) by Prampolini (1936) and Renato di Bosso's *Aerovisione sintetica e simultanea del Lago di Garda* (Figure 46 - Synthetic and Simultaneous Aeroview of the Lake Garda, 1934) are only two examples to illustrate how the late Futurists deployed the word synthesis in their work and, although the concept of synthesis informed Futurist ideology since its origins, in *Aeropittura* synthesis entails specifically aerial views. The style by which the process of synthesis is accomplished can vary. While Bosso's work is an unmistakable representation of an aerial landscape in which all the different elements such as buildings, water, sky and hills, though simplified, are easily recognisable, Prampolini's landscape is created in a different language. In order to depict a seaside town, Prampolini arranges some sparse elements evocative of the natural environment such as the sea and rocks and human presence with a reference to buildings and what it is probably a boat on the bottom right. The sapient combination of organic and constructive forms resulted in a suggestion of landscape in which

¹⁵⁷ "Dipingere dall'alto questa nuova realtà impone un disprezzo profondo per il dettaglio e una necessità di sintetizzare e trasfigurare tutto".

¹⁵⁸ Kern, p. 245.

the spectator becomes actively involved in identifying all the different components and interpreting the symbolism. As Prampolini says, "the artist-creator of new spiritual architecture exalts the metamorphosis of the real world and conveys an atmosphere of spiritual abstraction through the plastic analogy".¹⁵⁹ However, despite the different visual interpretations of synthesis it can be argued that they originated from the same source which, constituted by the aerial vision, could have stimulated the synthetic representation proposed by the Futurists in their art. The Futurists learned the synthesis and simplification by flight and then applied these ideas in their works. Synthesis was not intended as a way of simplifying reality but as a summation reached thorough the synthetic representation and symbolism. Depero aimed to communicate reality through synthesis and abstraction: "Reality is the unprocessed matter that the artist's hands have to manipulate. The second (abstractions) are those that elevate, transforming the reality in magic work of art".¹⁶⁰ Dottori in the article *Sintesi e deformazione in pittura* published in 1933 explains the Futurist concept of synthesis:

For us Futurists synthesis is not limited to the formal essentiality but transcends the finished, near, concrete in order to fly to encompass as much 'world' as possible, to enlarge the plastic vision beyond the visible. The synthesis is not conceived without the simultaneity that is itself synthesis of near-distant abstract-concrete lived-dreamed. Our research in Aeropittura has made possible the realisation of this vast, all-encompassing concept of the synthesis. In this our century in which speed has erased distances and transportation has reached such a perfection that it is now possible to image interplanetary travels, the artists are forced to represent this extension and vaster vision of the world.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Enrico Prampolini, "Valori spirituali della plastica Futurista", *Futurismo*, n. 5, 1932, p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Fortunato Depero, "Realtà ed astrazione" (1932) published in Luciano Caruso ed. *Manifesti, proclami, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo: 1909-1944* (Firenze: SPES, 1980), n. 206. "La realtà è materia grezza che le mani dell'artista deve manipolare. Le seconde sono quelle che elevano, trasformano la realtà in d'arte".

¹⁶¹ Gerardo Dottori, "Sintesi e deformazione in pittura", *Futurismo*, 26 February 1933, p. 3. "Per noi Futuristi la sintesi non si limita all'essentialità formale, ma trascende il finito, il vicino, il concreto, per spaziare abbracciare più mondo possibile allargare la visione plastica al di là del visibile. La sintesi come noi Futuristi la intendiamo non si concepisce senza la simultaneità che è sintesi di lontano-vicino concreto-astratto vissuto-sognato. Le nostre ricerche di aeropittura ci hanno portato alla realizzazione di questa concezione vasta, totalitaria della sintesi. Del resto in questo nostro secolo in cui la velocità ha annullato le distanze, in cui i mezzi di locomozione

The synthesis advocated by Dottori in order to paint different forms of reality originated from a visual dimension. It is an abstraction of the vision that is not intellectual or strictly mental, as constantly claimed in the critical reading of *Aeropittura*, because the origins have still to be found in vision and physical experience. The cosmic production of *Aeropittura* can be interpreted as a further process of synthesis applied to the documentary figurative language of space produced by artists such as Crali, Ambrosi, and Tato examined earlier. Once again, the concept of vastness and immensity could also find their appropriate counterpart in the notion of synthesis. "The word vast, for Baudelaire, is also the word that expresses the highest degree of synthesis. [...] Under the banner of the word vast, the spirit finds its synthetic being. The word vast reconciles contraries".¹⁶² According to Bachelard, immensity finds its best realisation in the word vast that operates a form of synthesis between the incommensurable and our senses. "When we examine images of immenseness, tiny and immense are compatible. [...] If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing".¹⁶³ The synthetic and reduced forms represented by the artists aim to translate the vastness and immensity of space into forms that possess the same force and energy. *Aeropittura* looked at the microscope to reproduce the materiality and the very essence of an outer world.

In *Aeropittura*'s synthetic representation particular forms recurrently appear to symbolise particular aspects of abstracted reality. The machine could be symbolised through the rationality of geometrical forms while nature and the human component through the organic and curvilinear. According to the artists it was not possible to fully recognise the mechanical

hanno raggiunto una tale perfezione da permettere di pensare ai viaggi interplanetari, si impone agli artisti un più vasto respiro e sintesi una più vasta visione del mondo".

¹⁶² Bachelard, p. 192.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 172.

elements in painting because they were only supposed to represent the very essence of the mechanical and technological. "One who gets upset because he cannot recognise any known forms in a Futurist painting forgets that when he admires a new machine he does not persist in looking for the tree or the mountain that provided wood and metal to form it".¹⁶⁴ In *Più pesante dell'aria* (Figure 47 - Heavier than Air, 1933-1934) Fillia clearly references the means of flight and the cosmic space by depicting a black sphere juxtaposed to a shape of an airplane on a white background. In his guidelines on the use of colours in *Aeropittura* he underlines "the vital importance of the black and white (with the grey as derivation) as opposed poles that encompass every chromatic sense".¹⁶⁵ Fillia explains that because the artists abstracted the forms of reality it was indispensable to learn how to use a spiritual alphabet that could regulate the use of colours. Lista claims that "the chromatic values are employed for a process of denaturalising of the form, rather they emphasise the symbolic status".¹⁶⁶ From this point of view the colours black, white and grey of Fillia's work represent the ultimate synthesis. The prominent role of the sphere at the centre of the image is connected by Lista with the spiritual mythology of flight. On a very simple level the spheres that appear in different *Aeropittura* works aim to symbolise planets in astronomic observation or a supernatural intelligence. However, as Bachelard explains, roundness also epitomizes the highest degree of unity: "seized in its centre and brevity the mere designation of roundness is astonishingly complete".¹⁶⁷ In *Più pesante dell'aria*, through the use of synthesised forms and symbolic colours, Fillia attempts to abstract and express the very essence of aerial space. Dottori, in his essay on landscape in *Aeropittura*, underlines that the use of round forms

¹⁶⁴ Fillia, "Spiritualità Futurista". "Chi si irrita ancora perchè in un quadro Futurista non riesce ad individuare forme a lui note dimentica che quando ammira una nuova macchina non si ostina a ricercare l'albero o la montagna che hanno fornito il legno o il metallo che la compongono".

¹⁶⁵ Fillia and Bracci, "La pittura spirituale", *L'Impero*, Rome, 15 March 1925. "L'importanza centrale del nero e del bianco (con il grigio derivato) come poli opposti che racchiudono ogni senso cromatico".

¹⁶⁶ Lista, p. 243. "I valori cromatici vengono utilizzati per un processo di denaturalizzazione della forma, mettendo piuttosto in evidenza il suo statuto simbolico".

¹⁶⁷ Bachelard, p. 238.

allows the painter (and the spectator) to be at the centre of the action and encircled by the natural space. In the religious art of the thirteenth century the circle and sphere symbolised eternity through the supposed endless movement of the circumference. This interpretation has also been applied to Futurist sacred painting.¹⁶⁸ As Poggi underlines, in the work *La sacra famiglia* (Figure 48 - The Holy Family, 1931) by Fillia, and in Futurist sacred painting in general, the red circle plays a prominent visual role in religious symbolism. According to Gleizes, the sphere and spiral in pictorial representation involve a completely different perception compared to the squares and rectangulars; it pertains to the realm of time and movement. As Peter Brooke explains:

The problem, as Gleizes understood, was that the circle and the spiral are of one nature, while the rectangle, the painter's usual starting point, is of another. The circle and the spiral incite the eye to follow them in their course and therefore to enter into movement. They are therefore of the nature of time, the rectangle invites the eye to seize it all at once, as a single shape or 'figure' or to assess its relation with other shapes or figures. It is static, of the nature of space.¹⁶⁹

In theories of environmental aesthetics, 'invitational features' including Renaissance perspective are strategically employed to guide the viewer into the pictorial space. Perspective as a participatory environmental feature performs the function of attracting the spectator into the representation and the similar use of the curve and circle may suggest their role as participatory environmental features. In Renaissance painting, a similar effect was sought through the pictorial convention of including a character in the image who meets the gaze of the spectator outside the painting. From this respect, the circle and the sphere can be considered as a recontextualised form of invitational feature to encourage spectatorial participation and a strategy to convey and symbolise dynamism. 'Placing the spectator at the

¹⁶⁸ This production of *Aeropittura* will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁹ Albert Gleizes, introduction and notes by Peter Brooke. *Art and Religion. Art and Science. Art and Production* (London: Francis Boutle, c1999 [Original edition 1933]), p. 22.

centre of the picture' was the slogan adopted by the first Futurists in their effort to involve the viewer into the action represented.¹⁷⁰ Equally important was the translation of the movement in space and time into painting. Unlike other artists of his time, Boccioni's representation did not include animals or the body in movement where motion was simulated mechanically. Instead dynamism had to be expressed differently in order to be relevant: "We would substitute a concept of dynamic continuity as unique form. And it is not by accident that I say form and not line, since dynamic form is a species of fourth dimension in painting and sculpture".¹⁷¹ In early Futurism the form of the spiral seemed to respond to the need of participation and movement. According to Boccioni the spiral was an innately dynamic shape expressive of four dimensions. Gleizes states that the spiral invites the spectator to follow the movement and from this point of view it implies both time and motion. It also allows a continuous exchange between positive and negative space and an uninterrupted dialectic between different areas of the image. To some extent, this also continued in late Futurism. The spiral appeared in "The Room of Icarus" at the Aeronautical Exhibition in 1934 in a space dedicated to the symbolism of flight. A blue spiral unfolded from the floor up to the black ceiling of the room and the cylindrical side walls were decorated with constructive drawing of airplanes and schemes of flights. The base of a statue portraying Icarus included the words of the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio stressing the suggestions of infinite altitude in which the spiral symbolised ascension and relentless movement.¹⁷² Moreover, the spin as an airplane manoeuvring, translated into spiralled forms, regularly appeared in Aeropittura works.

¹⁷⁰ *Manifesto dei Pittori Futuristi*, Milan 1912. "Noi porremo lo spettatore al centro del quadro".

¹⁷¹ Umberto Boccioni, "Plastic dynamism" (1913) in Umbro Apollonio ed. *Futurist Manifestos* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 93.

¹⁷² "Limite delle forze? Non v'è limite delle forze. Limite del coraggio? Non v'è limite del coraggio. Limite del patimento? Non v'è limite del patimento. Dico che il non più oltre è la bestemmia al Dio e all'uomo più oltraggiosa".

However, consistent with Boccioni's theory, the majority of Aeropittura works did not include a mechanical or fictional simulation of the movement of an airplane in flight because the need to experience movement intuitively was still an integral part, even in late Futurism. Work such as *Il mistero aereo* (Figure 49 - The Aerial Mystery, 1931) by Fillia, *Nascita della simultaneità* (Figure 50 - Birth of Simultaneity, 1932) and *Sintesi della sensibilità meccanica* (Figure 51 - Synthesis of the Mechanical Sensibility, 1930) by Pippo Oriani are representations evocative of motionless solidity and suspended time but at the same time the sphere and the curvilinear forms appear as rhythmical variations suggestive of movement. The movement suggested is not the powerful and rapid evolutions of an airplane but the more regular and measured motion of planets and galaxies. In *Sintesi della sensibilità meccanica* a gigantic human figure dominates the painting and at the centre of the body is located a perfect circle with an airplane inserted on its top left. The fluid shapes of the body and clouds contrast with the straight geometrical background which is also a feature in the bottom of the work. In this section, the artist creates a sort of triangular theoretical stage where in the black background a bottle and a musical instrument can be recognised. It could be an implied criticism to the traditional still life, so detested by the Futurists, which in this painting is not only represented in rigid geometrical language but is also completely outclassed by the other elements in the composition: the circumference and the airplane occupy a more prominent position in the work and the human figure literally stands and dominates a possible anachronistic and static representation.

If in the first Futurism the spiral was the geometric counterpart of the fourth dimension that symbolised movement in time and space, the sphere seems to perform the same role in Aeropittura's aesthetic vocabulary. Between 1933 and 1934, the artist Benedetta produced five works for a public commission in Palermo that were supposed to represent the synthesis of the aerial, terrestrial, maritime, telegraphic, phone and radio communications (Figure 52 -

Figure 53). The positive and powerful nature of modernity epitomized by the different forms of communication is celebrated and represented through the juxtaposition of basic synthetic forms. The combination of round forms and straight lines does not jeopardise the harmony of the image but through a symmetrical and gently balanced composition it conveys a synthesis of the invisible world of communications in space. The terrestrial space appears 'crushed', as the manifesto suggests, in a representation in which roads and the structure of the buildings are compressed on the painting background. On the assumption that, as Gleizes suggests, the rectangular forms symbolise the space as opposed to the organic and circular forms representing time, the recurrent juxtapositions of these different elements in *Aeropittura* proposes the high degree of synthesis required by a vast space in Bachelard's argument. The enlargement of space, the continuous motion and the insertion of time in painting that are constituents of the renewed cultural and scientific context are interpreted by the Futurists in the diverse production of *Aeropittura*. In order to accentuate different experiences of space through the symbolical meaning of forms, the Futurists juxtapose the curvilinear lines and organic forms with the grid that can be considered as the opposite of the invitational and participatory features discussed above. On a very basic level of interpretation, in *La conquista dello spazio. Intervista con il cielo* (Figure 54 - The Conquest of Space. Interview with the Sky, 1931) by Tullio Crali or *Passeggiata nello spazio* (Figure 55 - A Walk in Space, 1935) by Belli, the grid could signify an obstacle and barrier that prevents the spectator from seeing or experiencing space. This symbolises the artists' attempt to present a synthesis of the diverse conditions of an engagement with space including possible limitations to a full experience.¹⁷³ Depero, in reference to the work *Palombaro nello spazio* (post 1933) by Prampolini provides this compelling description:

¹⁷³ Also other works such as Pippo Oriani, *Conquista dello spazio* (Figure 15 – Conquest of Space, 1932); Cesare Andreoni, *Bozzetto navi-aereo* (Figure 56 - Sketch Boats-Airplanes, 1930-1934) and Enrico Prampolini,

A globe of land and water navigates within the clouds; the entrance of a tunnel of sidereal shades appears. The realistic references are not many but sufficient and described with an evanescence of tones and strong relief. The spectator is drawn to the expressive and intuitive fulcrum. [The painting] is an example of human and supernatural synthesis. The window of the house and the impenetrable grid on the universe are absorbed in the profile of an immense spatial interrogative in which the anguish, unknown and the certainty of the revelation flow simultaneously.¹⁷⁴

According to Depero, the grid in a painting is not only a sign of an awareness of the possible limitation of the experience of space but also a strategy to emphasise even more the infinity of space and at the same time the anxiety caused by such a feeling of immensity.

As examined, the notion of physicality lies throughout Aeropittura artistic production and theoretical discourses also appear in this 'cosmic' strand of Aeropittura through *polimaterismo*, which represents the artists' attempt to convey the different physicality of the materials in painting. The origin of *polimaterismo* can be traced in the artists' incorporation of construction and architectural materials in their painting.¹⁷⁵ In *Metamorfosi cosmica* (Figure 58 - Cosmic Metamorphosis, 1935), Prampolini proposes the use of a combination of traditional means of painting and alternative materials such as wood and cork. However, the insertion of unconventional materials in painting was not always achieved through a physical use of alternative materials. In the work *Forme forze nello spazio* (Figure 59 - Forms Forces in Space, 1932) by Prampolini and Elia Vottero's *Aeropittura-digregazione* (Figure 60 – Aeropittura-Disintegration, 1933) the organic forms simulate the consistency and semblance of natural element or even body parts. Placed on a flat background constituted of abstract forms and artificial colours, these organisms contrast with the overall geometrical composition and confer a more fantastic atmosphere to the image. Fillia in *Aeropittura*

Sezione d'oro-paesaggio di un'attrice (Figure 57 - Section Gold-Landscape of an Actress, 1930).

¹⁷⁴ Dep.4.1.69 (MART Archive).

¹⁷⁵ This topic will be discussed in the next chapter.

(Figure 61, 1931) and *Composizione plastica* (Figure 62 – Plastic Composition, 1931) deploys painting to imitate the rough surface of substances such as rocks or concrete. The physical solidity of painting is also palpable in the thick layers of painting applied in *Paesaggio* (Figure 63 – Landscape) by Fillia in 1932. Prampolini, in his *Arte polimaterica* published in 1944 expands some of the concepts originally expressed in 1934 in the article “Al di là della pittura. Verso i polimaterici”.¹⁷⁶ He argues that *polimaterismo* introduces in art a dimension of physicality, intuition and experiential perception. He rejects the allegation of intellectualism by saying:

The accusation of intellectualism that could be raised against this creative process cannot be sustained if we consider that is a pure act of emanation, primordial, even elementary where the sensorial and emotional faculties coincide.¹⁷⁷

Through *polimaterismo*, nature and physicality reappears in Aeropittura in the form of unconventional materials and substances. The synthesis operated on reality by the artists resulted in an array of symbolic forms and the introduction of physical elements in painting not only as a result of their revived interest in nature but in order to evoke the physical experience that was at the foundation of Aeropittura.

The artists' engagement with the aerial space was not only the consequence of a totalitarian regime or even the artists' political agenda. Although they were openly supporting the Fascist government and determined to establish themselves in the cultural environment, an interpretation of their production only in terms of their political convictions appears extremely reductive. The general cultural change in spatial theories that occurred at the

¹⁷⁶ Enrico Prampolini, *Arte polimaterica: verso un'arte collettiva?* (Rome: Istituto Grafico Tiberino, 1944); Enrico Prampolini, “Al di là della pittura verso i polimaterici”, in *Stile Futurista*, n. 2, August 1934, pp. 8-10.

¹⁷⁷ Prampolini, p. 10. “L'apparente accusa di intellettualismo che si potrebbe muovere verso un tale processo creativo cade quando si pensi che spaesato dagli elementi indiretti esso non è che un atto puro di emanazione diretta; primordiale se si vuole elementare, dove convergono e coincidono le facoltà sensoriali e quelle affettive”.

beginning of the twentieth century had remarkable effects both in early Futurism and in the 1930s. Whether popularized versions of Einstein's relativity theory became available or not in Italy in the 1920s, artists were aware of Einstein's discoveries and these had an impact on Aeropittura's notion of enlarged and ever changing space. In the years prior to the First World War, the fourth dimension was extensively explored in the Futurist production and in particular in Boccioni's sculptural work. Aeropittura was also inspired by the scientific method itself adopted as a form of exact technique in the process of creation. The vital role of technology and the machine, that constitutes the foundation of the 1909 manifesto, was developed further in Aeropittura, when technology was embodied by the airplane; the only means to experience a 'new' space. The fascination with aviation did not simply result in a mere representation of flight, airplanes and simulation of speed. The enlarged vision of the terrestrial space and the subjective translation of this geography into painting can be interpreted within a discourse of dominance and control of the territory as discussed in reference to the 'documentary' production of Aeropittura and Alfredo Ambrosi's work in particular. Inherent in Aeropittura is as a dual perception of space. The engagement with the terrestrial space is characterised by a removed and distant position where vision becomes the sense involved in the perception. On a different level, the physical appropriation and experience of space is diagnostic of an immersion in the aerial dimension through the means of flight. Although the vision of terrestrial space often results in a too-indulgent figurative language, the powerful effects of vision remain a fundamental component of Aeropittura. As Boccioni prescribed, movement in space and time needed to be intuited through the juxtaposition of forms and objects. The power of vision results in a synthetic image that translates the concept of space, time, movement, nature and technology into unique forms. *Polimaterismo* allowed the reintroduction of physicality into an aesthetic dominated by vision, an operation anticipated in the first Futurism and fully theorized in *Arte polimaterica*

by Prampolini. The idea of perceiving and producing art through experience and intuition was a fundamental principle in the first Futurism that coincided with the philosophy of Bergson and the work of the Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce. Aeropittura was faithful to this principle of the Futurist aesthetic and, although the imaginative quality of Aeropittura's cosmic strand might suggest a more intellectual approach to art, the works are nevertheless a product of visual synthesis and an evocation of a physical experience.

Chapter 3 Architectural Space

In the 1930s the renewal of architecture was an indispensable part of the political and cultural agenda. New theories and planning for innovative forms of architecture proliferated and developed in Italy. This interest in architecture was not restricted to any particular artistic group but was a common factor in many cultural and social environments. However, there were different ideas about what form, style or ideology Italian architecture in the 1930s should adopt or reflect. The architectural panorama of the period was very complex and generally speaking was mainly constituted by three different and opposing groups: the Academics, the Novecento movement and the Rationalists. While the Academics supported traditional styles, the supporters of Novecento, who were similarly inspired by a neoclassical language, insisted that architecture should avoid any period specificities. However, other members of Novecento, such as the architect Marcello Piacentini, proposed a form of architecture that was much more in line with the classical stereotype. The Rationalist groups such as *Gruppo 7* and *MLAR* represented the more advanced line of architectural theories and campaigned to promote new ideas of modern architecture influenced by contemporary architects such as Walter Gropius, Erich Mendelsohn and Le Corbusier.

Fascism considered architecture to be a central symbol of its political power and all these groups actively sought the regime's support. In the past, historians such as Bruno Zevi have attempted to attribute to the Rationalist movement some form of antifascism claiming that, although they were eventually corrupted by the regime, Rationalist art had maintained a strong antifascist attitude. This conventional interpretation has been reviewed in recent years, revealing a generally more ambiguous relationship between the different architectural movements and the political establishment. Mussolini himself stated that the most important

of all the arts was architecture, because it included all the other forms of artistic expression and he promoted an extensive campaign of architectural renovation. However, the regime never expressed a clear preference for any specific contemporary architectural style and the majority of artists active in the period fought to gain the regime's approval. Indeed virtually every sphere of cultural production was generally characterised by uncertainty as to what constituted the cultural orthodoxy in the Fascist regime. In reference to this vagueness in cultural policies Ellen Ruth Schapiro states: "The latent pluralism in Fascist ideology in the first years of Mussolini's rule was consistent with contemporary aesthetic pluralism. That both Croce and the Futurists could flirt with the regime in its early stages is a proof of the initially vague idea of what Fascism itself was".¹ Despite this ambiguous situation, it is widely recognised that over time Fascism became more obsessed with tradition and classical references creating a cultural environment in which modern and innovative design was distinctively disadvantaged.

In their struggle against the strong traditionalist tendency in Fascism, the Rationalists attempted to convince the regime of the power of modern architecture and were partly successful in obtaining commissions. The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution held in 1932 attested to the collaboration of many Rationalists and a project such as the *Casa del Fascio* (Figure 64 - 1936), local party headquarter in Como, by the architect Giuseppe Terragni is a striking example of modern principles applied to architecture. However, in particular after 1936 and the invasion of Ethiopia, the regime became more and more oriented towards a traditional and 'Roman' idea of architecture and the opportunities for the Rationalists to contribute to the architectural renovation became increasingly limited. Often, the artists had more opportunity to put their modern theories into practice in more decentralized areas such as the Italian city of Sabaudia in the Lazio region and Asmara, the capital of Eritrea.

¹ Ellen Ruth Shapiro, *Building under Mussolini*, Yale University PhD., p. 28.

In 1972, Cesare De Seta in his study *Cultura e architettura in Italia tra le due guerre*, analysed the ideological forces behind the development of architecture in Italy during Fascism and concentrated on some key figures involved in the main projects. In reference to the general Italian cultural situation in the period he has stated that the reasons why the regime never expressed any official opinion about styles in architecture was not due to a sort of liberalism but rather to a 'cultural emptiness' that characterised this period. He states: "The difficulty for the regime in choosing between the brigade of Rationalists and the ponderous group of academics with prominent positions in universities was exacerbated by the profession of Fascist faith made by both groups in support of their artistic theories".² Both groups were strongly nationalistic and they represented different sides of the regime itself: the initial revolutionary and innovative characteristics and the later traditional and reactionary nature. Moreover there were similar characteristics among the two different groups:

Critics today have come to view the debate between modernist and 'monumentalist' architects as a kind of struggle between the forces of good and evil. A careful examination of the Rationalist aesthetic, however, reveals some of its serious shortcomings: a confused notion of functionalism, classicism and rationalism. It was, in fact, the Rationalists' fundamental confusion and a kind of aesthetic frenzy that precluded their devising a coherent, viable architectural program that alone could represent the Fascist state.³

In the last twenty years scholars, architects and art historians have paid attention to this aspect of Italian history, which has been hitherto not only neglected, but also partially erased from the landscape after the fall of the regime. The conventional interpretation of a monumental and classical Fascist architecture opposed to a modern Rationalist and therefore democratic architecture has been dismantled all together.

² Cesare De Seta, "Cultura e architettura in Italia tra le due guerre" in Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patetta eds. *Il Razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il Fascismo* (Milan: Electa, c.1976), p. 11.

³ Schapiro, p. 247.

Architecture of the Modern Age

In this panorama of different styles, the Futurists enthusiastically participated in promoting the renewal of architecture by expressing a clear preference for a style that paralleled their support of modernity and innovation in other artistic practices. The artists were active in writing books and essays, developing architectural theories and even drawing plans and projects of buildings. Periodicals such as *Stile Futurista*, *La Città Nuova* and *Futurismo* are once again the platform for the dissemination of their opinions and theories on the new architecture. Fillia, in the first issue of *La Città Nuova* outlined the aims and characteristics of the new publication that, as suggested in the title, not only made a clear reference to the renewal of the urban environment but also established the Futurist legacy with Sant'Elia projects: "*La Città Nuova* is published with the precise aim of contributing towards the vast effort of renewing architecture and the decorative arts that is today carried out in Italy".⁴ Many Futurist artists awarded themselves the title 'architect' instead of simply artist or Futurist. They paid special attention to the theories that developed both in Europe and also amongst the Italian Rationalist group with whom they strenuously attempted to establish some forms of collaboration. An awareness of the important role that architecture played in the Fascist agenda, and their need to be acknowledged, encouraged the Futurists to be increasingly involved in architecture.

The interest of the Futurists in architecture emerged early in the twentieth century when the architect Sant'Elia, active from 1914, produced his influential drawings. The rediscovery and celebration of Sant'Elia became a common element in many discourses in architecture in this later period. Although Sant'Elia did not create any physical buildings that matched his

⁴ Fillia, "La nuova architettura", *La Città Nuova*, 6 February, 1932, p. 1. "La Città Nuova si pubblica con lo scopo preciso di portare un contributo chiarificatore al vasto sforzo di rinnovamento che oggi si combatte in Italia per l'architettura e le arti decorative."

Futuristic style, his visionary drawings were inspirational not only for the Futurists but also acted as a reference point for everyone working with and promoting a modern architectural language.

Predominantly, the Futurists reacted against any form of classical reference to architecture. One of the most important Futurist principles was the idea that people should live in accordance with the spirit of their age and, so far as architecture was concerned, this was only possible in a metropolitan setting built in accordance with the spirit the modern era. Living in old buildings was simply not acceptable. The periodical *Sant'Elia* expressed the importance of modernity in architecture by saying: "The new architecture aims to express truthfully the new state of mind. New materials are used and new rules are established in accordance with the economic situation and new social events. Architecture is inspired by the modern spirit and the forms of activity of modern life".⁵ The starting point of their argument was the connection with previous Futurist architecture. Paradoxically, in order to validate contemporary architecture they associated contemporary production with some key figures of pre-war Futurism. While in painting they attempted this by emphasized the continuity with Boccioni's art, in architecture they achieved the same result with Sant'Elia. In Fillia's 1931 book published entitled *La nuova architettura*, the opening essay is in fact the manifesto of architecture by Sant'Elia, published in July 1914.⁶ In order to take advantage of the wide recognition paid to the innovative nature of Sant'Elia's work, Fillia underlined the importance of the first Futurist legacy and promoted contemporary Futurists as the new champions of Sant'Elia's theories. As De Seta explains, Fillia wanted to read Futurism of the 1930s from

⁵ [Arch.] Levi Montalcini, "Il dinamismo lirico della nuova architettura", *Sant'Elia*, n. 45-46, 1933, p. 4. "La nuova architettura vuole esprimere sinceramente la mentalità nuova. Una nuova materia, i nuovi materiali da costruzione, dettano le sue leggi, le condizioni economiche, dovunque relativamente simili e i nuovi fatti sociali la dirigono; lo spirito moderno e le forme delle attività della vita moderna la ispirano".

⁶ Fillia ed. *La nuova architettura* (UTET: Turin, 1931).

the point of view of Sant'Elia's early ideas.⁷ However, like the period in which Sant'Elia operated, there were no tangible products of this ideal Futurist architecture and thus Fillia mainly included works that belonged to Italian and European rationalism that could be deployed to exemplify the theories of the Italian architect. In order to emphasise a connection with contemporary European architecture he includes essays by key figures such as Gropius and Le Corbusier.

Fillia is not the only artist who associates contemporary architecture with Sant'Elia's earlier theories. Alberto Sartoris was an architect who closely collaborated with the Futurists and in 1935 he published a book titled *Gli elementi dell'architettura razionale*.⁸ The publication was popular both in Italy and abroad and in the chapter "Le teorie dell'architettura moderna" Sartoris proposes a history of modern architecture from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1930s. By doing so he proclaimed Sant'Elia as the founder of all those theories: "Antonio Sant'Elia's Italian Futurism and dynamism are the milestone of the new architecture. They injected that spirit of urbanisation that has become the liveliest component of the European Rationalism and beyond".⁹ Ezio Godoli, in his essay "Sartoris e il movimento Futurista", explains that the architect's first participation in the Futurist movement is traceable to the *Prima Mostra di Architettura Futurista* held in Turin in 1928. According to Godoli what associated the Futurists with Sartoris was not necessarily their stylistic choices but rather a common commitment to the dissemination of modern art and architecture in Italy and in this respect Fillia's publication on architecture constitutes a valid contribution.

⁷ De Seta, p. 47.

⁸ Alberto Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell'architettura razionale* (Milan: Hoepli, 1935).

⁹ Sartoris, p.17. "Il Futurismo e il dinamismo di Antonio Sant'Elia sono fra le prime pietre miliari della nuova architettura. Essi le infusero quello spirito di urbanizzazione che è diventato la sostanza più vivace del razionalismo europeo e oltreoceano".

Occasionally the artists were particularly influenced by the deepest reaches of the past and despite their desire for modernity they regarded it as acceptable to take influences from the classical style. For example Pippo Oriani in “Sviluppo della nuova logico architettura” mentions Vitruvius and the five aspects of architecture as an important reference for the new architects.¹⁰ In *La nuova architettura*, Fillia sets out the characteristics of the new architecture: a distinctive metropolitan setting, the machine as a symbol and means for the new architecture and the new spirit of their time, the harmony between internal and external space of the buildings, rationalism and functionalism as guiding principles and finally the necessity of an original style, albeit one influenced by diverse architectural modes.

A few years later, in 1935, Fillia published another work that demonstrated the Futurists’ commitment to innovative principles in interior decoration and furniture design. In *Gli ambienti della nuova architettura* he examines different aspects of architectural, interior decoration and design demonstrating their interest in the entire process of developing new architecture and in particular in the coherence between outdoor and indoor spaces.¹¹ In the introduction Marinetti explained that architecture had to be complex but rational and clear: every superfluous detail needed to be eliminated. The buildings had to be perfect, modern and coherent examples of the application of new materials in architecture in which space had to be parallel to the modern style of life and civilization. Rational architecture was also partly criticised on the grounds that it focused extensively on external appearance with no concern for the internal space. When interiors were considered, the results were often overly austere and lacking in ‘lyricism’. The internal spaces needed to show the individuality that characterised the country and the geographical area in which they were produced. The buildings’ structure was to be consistent with the activity and the profession of the people

¹⁰ Pippo Oriani, “Sviluppo della nuova logico architettura”, *Stile Futurista*, n. 4, 1934, p. 14.

¹¹ Fillia ed. *Gli ambienti della nuova architettura* (UTET: Turin, 1935).

who lived and used the construction. At the same time colours, materials, furnishings and lyrical elements, such as painting and sculpture, had to match the artistic sensibility and spirituality of the occupant of the building as well as the general tone and ideology underlining the entire project. Prampolini in the essay “L’architettura dell’Italia Fascista” states

It is necessary to examine the foundation of Futurist principles in architecture: while it implicitly exalts the positive principles of functionalism at the same time it comprehends the spiritual, human and biological values. The Futurist architect leads the stark functionalism to the human sphere.¹²

The Futurist artists felt the need to imbue modern architectural theories with spiritual values. The importance of fidelity to geographical origins in creating the characteristics of architecture can be seen as part of an ongoing Fascist project to exalt ideas of national identity. In “L’architettura Futurista” Fillia defended Italian Futurism from allegations of imitation of foreign avant-garde styles and even states that the other European movements took inspiration from Futurism.¹³ Interpreted as a way of promoting the originality of their own work, this can also be seen as a way of pleasing the Fascist regime and underscoring the concept of ‘Italianità’, so important in the period. While the Futurists were looking to base their work on the new theories of architecture, they also attempted to propose an architecture that reflected the subjectivity and personality of the creators as well as representing some spiritual values.

¹² Enrico Prampolini, “L’architettura dell’Italia Fascista”, *Stile Futurista*, n. 1, 1934, p. 7. “Necessità quindi di guardare alle basi dell’architettura futurista che implicitamente mentre esalta i principi positivi del funzionalismo - intuizione del calcolo e del suo carattere specifico - contempla i valori spirituali, umani e biologici. L’architetto futurista aggiunge infine alla speculazione tecnica dell’arido funzionalismo, uno stato di grazia nel condurre questa formulistica nel l’ambito umano”.

¹³ Fillia, “L’architettura Futurista”, *La Città Nuova*, 5 January 1934, p. 1.

It was the emphasis on machinery and technology that gave Futurist Aeropittura its distinctive character. However, the incorporation of motifs inspired by technological progress in architecture was not something particularly innovative at the time. Le Corbusier and his *machine à habiter* promoted the idea of an architecture that reflected the efficiency and functionality of the machine and could operate as an organised and structured assemblage. For the Futurist in the 1930s the archetypal machine was the aeroplane. Architecture was not only supposed to imitate the 'perfection' of the machine but was also to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life for the population. Moreover, the architecture of the airports not only had to house aeroplanes and allow flight transports, but it also had to provide an aesthetically coherent setting for these modern, impressive machines. Several periodicals offered theories about the relationship between architecture and aviation and how this relationship should be reflected in airport design. They discussed the structure of the airports themselves, new methods of implementing transport in the urban environment such as the possibility of flights between different airports within the same city and the aesthetic principles on which airport buildings should be designed. Firstly, they connected the idea of the aeroplane and aviation with ideas of technological development in architecture showing how architecture and technology are considered to be two vital aspects of modern life that have to develop in parallel.

Aviation is more topical to architectural theories than any other field. In fact, the artist [architect] cannot start his work from a stable and definite concept of functionality since this concept is under continuous transformation and development to satisfy the variable needs of the progress in aviation.¹⁴

¹⁴ Enzo Bartocci, "Aviazione ed aeronautica", *Sant'Elia*, n. 4, 1933, p. 2. "...il problema architettonico è più difficile in aeronautica che altrove. L'artista infatti non può partire, come negli altri casi, da una 'funzionalità' stabile e definitiva in quanto questa, in aeronautica, è in continua trasformazione evolutiva per essere sempre all'altezza di soddisfare le sempre variabili esigenze del mezzo aereo in costante progresso".

Their theories have very utopian connotations that are particularly evident in the poetic and lyrical descriptions of possible architectural production. It seems that they are not particularly engaged with finding technical solutions to existing problems or planning realistic architectural projects. Instead they concentrate their work on describing utopian buildings in a language that seems to be closer to advertising and creative writing than viable technical projects.

[Architecture must be created] in a Futurist way, because the Futurist principles must be applied to airport architecture. The whole of the airport building has to be agile, colourful, and dynamic. Hangars, walkways, maintenance sites, signs, restaurants and aero-clubs should surround the aerial station in a way that seems intuitive for the traveller of the sky. The interior design should be original and tasteful and contribute to an atmosphere that meets the sensitive mood of the flyer.¹⁵

Godoli defines this aspect of Futurist ideology as 'Futurist fanta-urbanism' in particular reference to the planning of aerial traffic in the city that had to replace other forms of transport.¹⁶ Besides the collaboration between the architecture and machine/aeroplane the Futurists considered the aesthetic effects in architecture as a consequence of the development of aviation. In 1933, Enzo Bartocci writes:

The modern architects in their buildings have to take into account another aesthetic factor no less important: observation from above. [...]. The pleasant appearance of a city seen analytically by a pedestrian who walks through the streets is not enough. It has to be the same if the city is seen from above with a panoramic perspective.¹⁷

¹⁵ Leonardo Algardi, "Architettura d'aeroporti", *Futurismo*, n. 18, 1933, p. 6. "Futuristicamente perchè è nell'aeroporto, ancor più che in un grattacielo o in uno studio, dove l'architettura futurista deve essere applicata. Tutto l'insieme deve essere arioso agile colorato veloce. Aviorimesse, scivoli, cantieri, segnalazioni ristorante, aeroclub, ecc, devono disposti intorno alla stazione aerea con quella successione di ordine che è intuitiva nel viaggiatore del cielo; l'arte decorativa deve trovare negli interni il massimo dell'originalità e del buon gusto, mentre l'atmosfera dell'ambientamento deve rispondere in modo semplice e preciso allo speciale sensibile stato d'animo dei volatori".

¹⁶ Ezio Godoli, *Guida all'architettura moderna. Il Futurismo* (Rome: Laterza, 1983), p. 135.

¹⁷ Bartocci, p. 2. "Gli architetti moderni però nelle loro aerocostruzioni devono tener conto di un altro fattore estetico non meno importante di quelli finora accennati: l'osservazione dall'alto. Non sarà quindi più sufficiente

This idea finds further development in the *Manifesto dell'Architettura Aerea* published in the *Gazzetta del Popolo* on 28th January 1934. The manifesto was signed by Marinetti, Mino Somenzi, a journalist who extensively wrote in several Futurist periodicals, and Angiolo Mazzoni who, besides being an active supporter of Futurism, was also in charge of the development of some public buildings in Italy and interceded so that the Futurists could obtain commissions for some public decorations. Despite his strong connection with Futurism, later in his life Mazzoni repudiated this association. In one letter written to Bruno Zevi, Mazzoni states that the manifesto of aerial architecture was inspired by a casual statement made about the needs for the architecture to be sufficiently robust to resist potential aerial bombing and the possibility of creating special protective covering and underground buildings for this same reason.

As a result of my statement, [...] which was only made for the sake of discussion, [...] Marinetti and Somenzi started making bizarre comments and fantasising about an impossible urban setting. Marinetti and Somenzi got very excited about it and from their 'prolific brains' the Manifesto was born. I signed it as well but I was not happy to see it published.¹⁸

In his letters, Mazzoni often contradicted himself in reference to his association with Futurism and his active contribution to the Futurist periodicals tends to challenge his attempt to downplay his collaboration with Futurism. His analysis of Futurism is often characterised by criticism alternated with favourable comment such as the claim that Rationalism and Functionalism were both a development of Futurism. "Only by tracing the origin of the pure

che una città abbia un gradevole aspetto se vista analiticamente dal pedone che passeggia per le sue vie ma occorrerà che essa lo abbia anche quando è guardata da un aereo nel aspetto panoramico".

¹⁸ Mazzoni Collection, Maz D15 1674 d.tif, (MART Archive), p. 2. "Conseguenza di questa osservazione furono i commenti più o meno fantastici di una sistemazione urbanistica, forse impossibile, certo inverosimile, commenti detti per gusto di polemica. [...] Marinetti e Somenzi invece, si entusiasmarono e con sonorità di parole, scaturita dal fecondo cervello di ambedue, naque il manifesto che firmai io pure. Quando lo vidi pubblicato non ne fui lieto".

source of Futurism, Rationalism, which is its son, will be able to find salvation and reason for being”.¹⁹ It is not difficult to image how this claim caused a wave of protests among the Rationalists who did not see the Futurists in a good light and wanted to keep a distance between the two movements. Even Sartoris disagreed with this statement and, rather, proposed an interpretation of the two movements as different but running parallel.

Whatever the origins of this manifesto of aerial architecture, its ideas were discussed extensively in Futurist publications. The manifesto explains how aviation and the aeroplane have modified human sensibility. Architecture, as one of the symbols of the new age, has to adapt to this new spirit and atmosphere. The manifesto states that the poets and architects have created the “unified city with its continuous lines to admire in flight”. They were not interested in roofs or façades: the city had to be imagined as an endless net of geometrical forms of buildings, connected by a lattice of roads. The Lingotto FIAT car factory in Turin was considered as the archetype of the new aerial architecture. Not only did the Lingotto have the architectural characteristics that fascinated the Futurists but the ideas behind the project excited their ‘modern spirit’. The car factory complex and the efficiency of the assembly-line production, conceived as a ‘machine’, followed the example of contemporary American factories. However, what was considered fascinating, and not only by the Futurists, was the inclusion of an oval racetrack on the top of the building, used to test the cars produced in the factory. The track on the roof was clearly visible from the aeroplane and modified the aerial appearance of the city. It was the quintessence of modern architecture, displaying speed, velocity and monumentality and an alliance with industry regarded as indispensable. Terry Kirk in *Vision of Utopia* reports the description of the building by Luigi Bazzani: “a new place for the power of the industry, the assembly line like church naves with automobiles in steady

¹⁹ Mazzoni, “L’architettura italiana si chiama Sant’Elia”, *Futurismo*, 14 May 1933, p. 1. “Solo risalendo alle pure fonti del futurismo, il razionalismo che ne è figlio, potrà trovare la sua salvezza e la sua ragione d’essere”.

procession...something solemn and mysterious in that cathedral-like vastness”.²⁰ If the Lingotto factory represented the ideal architecture for the Futurists, they did not appreciate more traditional and contemporary Italian architecture. In their manifesto Marinetti, Somenzi and Mazzoni said: “to the flyer the cities look like clusters of wrecks, heaps of rubble, piles of bricks...There is no colour, character, geometry, rhythm”.²¹ The characteristics of the new metropolitan architecture were dynamism, speed, precision, grandiosity, harmony and the use of modern materials. A notable reference to the theme of flight in association with architecture can be found in *Aircraft* by Le Corbusier. Published in 1935, just one year after the *Manifesto dell'Architettura Aerea*, the book includes aerial photographs of cities and striking images of aeroplanes. In this work, the architect mentions two of the main themes of Futurism in the 1930s: architecture and flight.

We desire to change something in the present world. For the bird's eye view has enabled us to see our cities and the countries which surround them, and the sight is not good. We knew quite well that our cities were steeped in indignities abhorrent to men; that our cities made martyrs of men, and that we are deprived of 'essential delights.' The aeroplane is an indictment. It indicts the city. By means of the aeroplane, we now have proof, recorded on the photographic plane, of the rightness of our desire to alter methods of architecture and town-planning. There is a degree of error that cannot be exceeded....²²

Le Corbusier considers the aeroplane as indispensable to the future of architectural production. As analysed above, aviation influenced Futurist architectural theories, but whether this source of inspiration influenced their artistic production is debatable. It can confidently be said that very few buildings or constructions were produced in accordance

²⁰ Terry Kirk, *Vision of Utopia* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), p. 61.

²¹ *Manifesto dell'Architettura Aerea* (1934). “Ai volatori, infatti, sembrano mucchi di rottami, affastellamenti di calcinacci, sparpagliamenti di mattoni o piaghe slabbrate.... nè colore, nè carattere, nè geometria, nè ritmo”.

²² Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (London: Trefoil, 1987. First Published 1935), p. 11.

with their theories. As in the case of the Lingotto FIAT factory in the Manifesto, they mostly 'borrowed' existent buildings and elevated them as emblems of their theories.

The utopian association between flight and architecture also referenced some of the constituent principles of Aeropittura, in particular the yearning for a loss of gravity. In *Stile Futurista* and *Futurismo* articles were dedicated to the architect Guido Fiorini's project called *Tensistruttura*.²³ By using a steel structure and tie bars it was possible to free the space at the base to be used for pedestrian and other forms of traffic, reducing the need for a substantial central support. This could result in a form of architecture that could be flexible, light and 'airy'.

As the previous chapter showed, the urban environment affected the representation of landscape in painting. The enthusiasm for the aesthetics of architecture and planning had a great influence on Aeropittura. The manifesto of aerial architecture promoted the idea of the scenographical and spectacular aspects of architecture and the city seen from above and this became an inspiration for several artists. It is interesting to note how an exhibition that was organised in Italy between 2007-2008 entitled *Il futuro del Futurismo* attempted to trace the influence of Futurist ideas on more recent architectural works.²⁴ This exhibition examined Futurist themes that appeared both in the pre-First World War Futurism and in the later development of the movement in the 1930s. Although the exhibition did not include a section devoted to Aeropittura specifically or to the theme of aviation and architecture, it is interesting that in the section entitled *Energia metropolitana* there are two aeropaintings that represent the image of a city seen from above. The exhibition included works by Nicolaj Diulgheroff and Crali as examples of the extent to which artists were fascinated by the spectacular scene of a city seen from an aeroplane in flight. It is important to remember that

²³ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "L'architetto Futurista Fiorini", *Stile Futurista*, 1, n. 3, September 1934, p. 15.

²⁴ Giacinto di Pierantonio and Maria Cristina Rodeschini eds. *Il futuro del Futurismo*. exh. cat.. Milan, 2007.

the majority of those artists were expert pilots. In Diulgheroff's *Luce-Spazio* (Figure 65 - Light-Space, c.1930) a photograph of a city from above is inserted in the painting. Crali, in *Incuneandosi nell'abitato* (Figure 66 - Nose Diving on the City, 1939), depicts a jungle of buildings that incorporate and absorb the aircraft and the pilot. The language and style is drawn from comic strip and advertising influences. Crali shows his interest in architecture in some designs for Futuristic airports. The building's design had to reflect their function and his proposed buildings look like machines ready to take off.

The Futurists were not alone in representing the city as a subject in painting in Italy in this period. However, while the Futurist works are permeated by an atmosphere of optimism, idolatry of technology, speed and dynamism, other artists manifested a different attitude toward the urban environment. Commenting on Mario Sironi's paintings, De Seta points out:

And there was Sironi and his city of suburbs. A rejecter of the modern, the metropolis and progress. Wherever you look, Sironi is dominated by funereal fatalism: his magnificent but overwhelming mountains and his oppressive cities, gasometers or *ferrerie*. The artist as a romantic incarnation challenges the eternal titan, the fatal inevitability.²⁵

Not only are the themes of aviation and the city seen from above totally missing in Sironi's paintings but architecture is also absent, not considered an indispensable tool for the renewal of society. The city is seen more as an impediment to spiritual progress and a threat.

Massimo Bontempelli, editor of some Rationalist periodicals, criticised what he considered to be the Futurists' visually limited approach to architecture. According to him, the Futurists speculated on architecture, planned buildings and produced paintings with architectural elements but never put their ideas into practice. He stated that while the Rationalists were

²⁵ De Seta, p. 50. "E c'era di mezzo Sironi e la sua città di periferie. Un rigetto del moderno, della metropoli, del progresso è stato detto. Sironi infatti è dominato da un fatalismo funereo dovunque giri lo sguardo, sui monti titanicamente grandiosi, ma nature incubo, percuotenti e opprimenti o nelle città, gasometri o ferrerie. L'artista ancora in incarnati romantici, sfida, eterno titano, la condanna fatale e della natura e della città, prende per sé la sfida della violenza sulla misura premoderna, agraria, dell'umanità e sulla misura moderna, urbana, si fa dalla parte del rozzo, dell'etica della brutalità che va ad ergersi dal fondo contro la fatalità".

interested in the constructive side of architecture, the Futurists were much more focused on its theatrical and decorative aspects. The only purpose of the Futurist city was to be seen (obviously from above) rather than lived in. Although some criticism was in fact well grounded, it is important to remember that besides the theatrical representations of architecture in their paintings, the Futurists claimed to use the alliance between architecture and aviation to represent and reconstruct reality in accordance with the new spirit of their age. As Prampolini says, "the artist-creator of new spiritual architecture exalts the metamorphosis of the real world and conveys an atmosphere of spiritual abstraction through the plastic analogy".²⁶ They claim that the new aerial perspective has given them the opportunity to know and recreate a new world of 'multiperspectives' and synthesised forms. As previously mentioned, this was not only applicable to painting but also architecture. According to Le Corbusier:

These forms, elementary or subtle, tractable or brutal, work physiologically upon our senses (sphere, cube, cylinder, horizontal, vertical, oblique. etc.) and excite them. Being moved, we are able to get beyond the cruder sensation; certain relationships are thus born which work upon our perceptions and put us into a state of satisfaction in which man can employ fully his gifts of memory, of analysis, of reasoning and of creation.²⁷

The concepts of synthesis and simplification learned by the artists through the means of flight were also applied to their architectural theories. Sartoris, whose work was often appropriated to represent the embodiment of the Futurist principles, applied these ideas to his works by creating a complex structure through the assembling of basic elements. In the project for the *Church of Notre Dame Du Phare* (1931) he plays with, and merges, different geometrical

²⁶ Enrico Prampolini, "Valori spirituali della plastica Futurista", *Futurismo*, n. 5, 1932, p. 4. "...così l'artista creatore delle nuove architetture spirituali esalta la metamorfosi del mondo reale trasportandoci in un'atmosfera di astrazione spirituale attraverso l'analogia plastica".

²⁷ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1946. First published 1931), p. 16.

forms such as rectangles, spheres, squares and other geometrical forms to create a completely new entity. Despite their interest in simple forms, linearity and functionality the Futurists were not resolutely opposed to any decoration in both internal and external spaces. They criticised the Rationalists for being excessively concentrated on function resulting in an austere and plain construction. Although the Futurists recognised that the Rationalist houses were masterpieces of functionality, they claimed that could never live in such gloomy buildings. Decoration, colour and variety were not negotiable in the Futurist notion of architecture. Sartoris declared his admiration for Theo van Doesburg's ability to create the perfect architectural spaces through the precise use of colours. Although the Futurists were open to different influences, their main concern was also to produce and create a space that could not only respond to particular functions but also was coherent with their aesthetic principles.

Reconstructing Space

A preoccupation with new forms of space is inherent in late Futurist ideology and developed in particular within Aeropittura. Here architecture entered primarily as a theme in their painting and many artists began representing volumes and made architectural references in their works. When the Futurists flew, they gained a thrilling new perspective of the physical environment and that created the desire to represent this experience artistically. In Crali's *Aeroplani sulla metropoli* (Figure 67 - Aeroplanes on the Metropolis, 1926) and *Caproncino in decollo* (Figure 68 - *Caproncino* Taking Off, 1932) or Cesare Andreoni's *Paesaggio aereo* (Figure 69 - Aerial Landscape, 1932) the panorama becomes an experimentation of geometrical forms and colours. The alternation of these forms and the rhythm of colours result in new constructive elements. By flying they learned the force of synthesis and were

inspired to create their own works reproducing the novel aerial perspective of architecture. In works such as *Più pesante dell'aria* (Figure 47- Heavier than Air, 1933-34) and *L'idolo del cielo* (Figure 70 - The Idol of the Sky, 1932-1934) by Fillia or *Forme forze nello spazio* (Figure 59 - Forms Forces in Space, 1932) by Prampolini the impression received by the viewer is one of primordial, abstract and simple forms that become representative of more complex realities.

However, the next step of their new experience of space compelled the artists not only to use architecture as a source of inspiration for their art but they also wanted to reconstruct the physical environment and interact with it. They aimed to use architecture, painting and other artistic techniques to reshape their physical environment. Fillia in his book on interior decoration describes the functionalist and Rationalist structures as the very best architectural style for the modern age. Discussing the very nature of their work, Prampolini says “we celebrate the positive principles of functionalism and at the same time we contemplate the spiritual, human and biological values”.²⁸ However, modernity in their eyes could not be adequately represented by the use of traditional aesthetic methods. Easels and canvas had to make way for contemporary methods of artistic expression.

The Futurists were particularly fascinated with the idea of a continuous space in which decoration was not applied but was part of the building itself and therefore coherent with the whole construction. Henri Lefebvre in his book *The Production of Space* identifies the beginning of a new awareness of space with the artistic developments of the Bauhaus:

The artist understood that things could not be created independently of each other in space, whether movable (furniture) or fixed (buildings), without taking into account their interrelationship and also their relationship to the whole. [...] Formerly, artistic ensembles had been

²⁸ Enrico Prampolini, “L’architettura dell’Italia Fascista”, *Stile Futurista*, n. 1, 1934, p. 7. “....mentre esalta i principi positivi del funzionalismo — intuizione del calcolo e del suo carattere specifico — contempla i valori spirituali, umani e biologici”.

created by a variety of artists according to subjective criteria: taste of princes, the intelligence or rich patrons, the genius of the artists themselves.[..] The resulting whole might constitute a space with a particular style, often even a dazzling style - but it was still a space never rationally defined which came into being and disappeared for no clear reasons.²⁹

Lefebvre claims that Gropius understood that the production of a spatial environment entailed “mastering global space by bringing forms, functions and structures together in accordance with a unitary conception”.³⁰ As a consequence, Lefebvre argues “a new consciousness of space emerged whereby space (an object in its surrounding) was explored, the idea of the façade faded away and “global space established itself in the abstract as a void waiting to be filled, a medium waiting to be colonized”.³¹ Some of these elements were borrowed by the Futurists and implemented in their architectural and design theories.

The Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution organised in 1932 was an important showcase for artists who had the opportunity to elaborate and implement some of their theories on decoration and architecture. This exhibition has been extensively discussed in reference to the visual propaganda produced by the regime at this time, and, as a testimony to the multiplicity of languages and styles employed. The general themes of the exhibition concerned the history of Fascism and the achievements of the regime. Although clear instructions were given on the types of work that were expected, the artists involved in the project belonged to different movements and artistic groups. *Le Sale del Lavoro* were the spaces on the second floor created by the Futurists Gerardo Dottori and Enrico Prampolini. The artists produced an articulated idea of total space where architectural installations, paintings and sculptures operated together to convey the theme of the room. In the central space Prampolini placed a pedestal with a sphere on top encased in a lattice of squares (Figure 71). The juxtaposition of

²⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Chicago, Illinois: Blackwell, 1991), p. 124.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

³¹ Ibid., p. 125.

the straight lines with the circular form to which they are applied created a focus at the centre of the room and at the same time animated the space. The reference on the sphere to the scientist and inventor of the radio, Guglielmo Marconi, made a clear statement regarding the significance of Italian scientific developments. Although, the Futurists claimed that the exhibition was the perfect manifestation of Futurist principles, the exhibition allocated very limited space to the Futurists and the promotional material and the press made little reference to the movement. In the rare cases in which attention was paid to the Futurists the tone was rather patronising. Despite the fact that Fillia and others described the exhibition as Futurist because of its modern quality, the show testified to the 'failure' of Futurism and the limited appeal of Futurist ideas. The publication *Muri ai pittori* underlines that the participation of the Futurists at the exhibition had little impact at the time.

Despite their not so notable presence in the exhibition, in the following years that event will represent a very important reference for the Futurists who will continue to consider the influence of their style as determined by the production of the other artists.³²

In fact several other Futurist artists praised particularly Prampolini's room as one of the most successful in the show. Fillia was particular enthusiastic about the final result:

Prampolini created the room of the confederations and his plastic ideation is different from the creations of the other artists. The room is balanced in all its aspects with a constructive atmosphere that is both an expression of force and lyricism. In the middle of the room Prampolini positioned a significant plastic glorification of Marconi. It is a marvellous composition in wood and iron where, not only artistically but also scientifically, the principles of the inventions by Marconi are illustrated. It a play of waves transmitting and receiving,

³² Vittorio Fagone, Giovanna Ginex and Tulliola Sparagni eds. *Muri ai pittori. Pittura murale e decorazione in Italia, 1930-1950* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1990), p. 74. "Nonostante la loro non rilevante presenza alla mostra, tale evento rappresenterà negli anni successivi un importantissimo riferimento per i Futuristi che continueranno a considerare determinante l'influenza del loro stile anche per le realizzazioni degli altri artisti".

produced from the aluminium that wraps the sphere of the world with their vibrations and sonorities.³³

In *Muri ai pittori*, it is underlined how the work by Prampolini was an attempt to merge the bidimensional mural decoration with the three-dimensional and constructivist experience of space in the room.³⁴ Fillia also commented on Prampolini's paintings located in the room about the events happened in 1919:

These paintings by Prampolini, despite the fact they illustrate two historical facts, don't have any element of the anecdotal. The event is not represented pictorially, but the artist conveys the plastic atmosphere of those days, the drama of enthusiastic ideas described by the arabesque of forms and colours.³⁵

The Futurist interest in the creation of a coherent and total architectural space resulted in the development of a technique that they called *plastica murale* which would demonstrate the fruitful alliance between decorative art and architecture.³⁶

Plastica Murale

The Futurist *plastica murale* has occasionally been analysed within a broad discourse on mural decoration that became popular in the 1930s in Italy but also internationally. Mural art

³³ Fillia, "Prampolini alla Mostra della Rivoluzione. La Sala delle Confederazioni", 1932-1933, ms.480 (MART Archive). "Prampolini ha creato la sala delle confederazioni e la sua ideazione plastica si differenzia da quella degli altri artisti. Vi è un equilibrio maggiore in tutte le parti della sala, atmosfera costruttiva che ha insieme espressione di forza e lirismo. Al centro della sala è posta una grande glorificazione plastica di Marconi. Meravigliosa composizione di legno e metallo, dove non soltanto artisticamente ma scientificamente sono illustrati i principi delle invenzioni di Marconi. È un gioco d'onde trasmettenti e riceventi, ricavate plasticamente dall'alluminio, che fasciano la sfera del mondo con le loro vibrazioni e la loro sonorità".

³⁴ *Muri ai Pittori*, p. 74.

³⁵ Fillia, "Prampolini alla Mostra della Rivoluzione. La Sala delle Confederazioni", 1932-1933, ms.480 (MART Archive). "Queste pitture di Prampolini, pur illustrando due fatti storici, nulla hanno di aneddótico. Non vi è il fatto rappresentato pittoricamente, ma vi è l'atmosfera plastica di quei momenti, il dramma di idee di entusiasmi descritti dall'arabesco delle forme e dei colori".

³⁶ Generally speaking with *plastica murale* the artists defined a form of mural art (mainly as interior decoration) that included the deployment of different materials and techniques. Although *plastica murale* has occasionally been translated as 'mural plasticism', in this text the Italian original definition will be maintained.

was clearly not a Futurist invention. The possibility of involving vast audiences, making it particularly suitable for the exploration of social and political themes, surely contributed to the increase in popularity of mural painting worldwide during this period. The PWAP (Public Works of Art Project) in America and the murals by Diego Rivera David, Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco in Mexico are just some examples in which mural painting was extensively deployed for its social impact. In Italy groups of artists became very active in producing different forms of mural painting. Artists affiliated with the Novecento movement created mural paintings and decorations that were exhibited at the Triennial in Milan in 1933, which quickly became a perfect showcase for the new mural works. Just a year earlier, an article published by Mario Sironi discussed the notion and purpose of mural art. Some of the key figures of the Novecento movement, such as Campigli, Carrà, Funi and Sironi, had signed the manifesto of mural painting in which they argued for a genre of painting that could have wide social applications.³⁷ The ideology that the manifesto expresses seems to be in accordance with the Futurist idea of unifying different art forms and combining architectural principles with art and design principles. However, Sironi describes muralism as “social painting par excellence. It works upon the popular imagination more directly than any other form of painting, while directly inspiring the decorative arts. [...] It demands mature creations that springs forth fully formed in the artist’s mind”.³⁸ In his work Sironi proposed the destruction of individualism and as Jeffrey Schnapp explains “anonymity designated the social mission of Sironi’s exhibition: to reintegrate the artist into society as an ordinary man among men to place his work in the service of a single Fascist style and to imprint his style on the mass audience”.³⁹ Despite the fact that they both propose an idea of mural art, it becomes immediately clear that there were many differences between Sironi and the Futurists in

³⁷ Massimo Campigli, Carlo Carrà, Achille Funi and Mario Sironi, *Manifesto della Pittura Murale* (1933).

³⁸ Schanpp, *Donatello and the Blackshirts*, pp. 238-239.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

reference to this artistic technique. While Sironi opted for a completely figurative style the Futurists proposed a form of decoration that was neither figurative nor completely abstract or conceptual. In the context of mural painting, Sironi praised the anonymity of the artist, claiming the subsidiary role and function of the artist who simply had to act as a social interpreter reflecting and representing reality. The Futurist deployed mural art for its aesthetic function and not for any alleged wide social impact. Moreover, great importance was attributed to the artists' persona and their individual creative power that can be associated to the idea of the artistic demiurge proposed by Le Corbusier. Furthermore, the use of the manifesto as a format appears to be redolent of Futurist methods.

Although, the ideological assumptions behind Futurist mural art were very dissimilar from Sironi and Novecento's, the function of the majority of mural art produced in the period was designed with Fascist official and public buildings in mind. The Futurists vigorously criticised the mural paintings exhibited at the Triennial in 1933. The show was mainly concentrated on the emerging Italian Rationalists and traditional architecture and the Futurists occupied a rather marginal role. There was also a great emphasis on mural painting. Although the Futurists praised the new architectural ideas presented in the triennial, they openly denounced the mural paintings on display for their style which they considered to be too academic, traditional and classical. According to the Futurists that sort of mural painting could not coexist with modern architecture. The styles were totally incompatible. Examples of mural painting include Gino Severini's fresco in the main hall at the Triennale and, later, Sironi's fresco at the University in Rome. The Futurists could not tolerate the figurative language, the strong classical references and the general anti-modern atmosphere that the works seemed to emanate. Depero expresses his vehement distaste for the works produced for the Triennial:

Their pictorial rectangles jammed against one another, disparate, discordant, are nothing less than pejorative expansions of their paintings. These mural paintings are not modern at all, neither in reference to technique, nor in their conception. They are neither coherent with the architecture nor decoratively functional.⁴⁰

On the other hand, according to the Futurists, *plastica murale* was the perfect mural decoration, suitable for modern architecture and their new notion of space. Prampolini argued that “the new Futurist and functional architecture demands a new interpretation of space; a new architectural reality should correspond to a new technical reality”.⁴¹ In *La Città Nuova* Fillia states:

The new architecture requires a *plastica murale* that is not only ornamental and decorative, because the new architecture has its own decorative values in the geometrical splendour of its lines. [...] The new architecture needs a mural plastic that reveals the mystery of our age, and creates the images of our time.⁴²

1934 was the year of the real development of *plastica murale*. Many articles were dedicated to this subject, a manifesto was published and at the end of the year an exhibition about *plastica murale* was held. Prampolini wrote an article entitled “Al di là della pittura. Verso i polimaterici” in which he explained the main concept of this technique. He argued that the traditional medium of oil on canvas was in crisis and identified architectural principles as central to any form of contemporary art production. He says: “The key word is now

⁴⁰ Fortunato Depero Dep_4_077-1.tif (MART Archive) “La Plastica Murale”, speech delivered by Depero in Milan on 19 December 1934. “I loro rettangoli pittorici appiccicati l’uno accanto all’altro, disparati, discordanti non furono che ingrandimenti peggiorativi dei loro dipinti. Questi quadri murali non furono affatto moderni nè alla tecnica, nè alla concezione; non furono organici con l’architettura, nè funzionalmente decorative”.

⁴¹ Enrico Prampolini, “Al di là della pittura verso i polimaterici”, *Stile Futurista*, n. 2, 1934, p. 8. “La nuova architettura futurista e funzionale esige una altrettanto nuova e assoluta interpretazione plastica delle vaste superfici spaziali; è naturale quindi che ad una nuova realtà architettonica corrisponda un’adeguata e nuova realtà tecnica”.

⁴² Fillia, “Architettura e Plastica Murale”, *La Città Nuova*, n. 1, 1934, p. 6. “La nuova architettura richiede una pittura che non sia unicamente ornamentale, cioè motivi di forma e di colore in armonia con l’ambiente, perché la nuova architettura ha i suoi valori ornamentali nei materiali stessi che la compongono, nello splendore geometrico delle sue linee.[...] Una pittura che riveli alla nostra sensibilità le profondità e i misteri della nostra epoca, creando le immagini plastiche del nostro tempo”.

architecture. For all the artists this mother of all the arts, the fecund source of spiritual communions, restores the passion for constructed space, order, measure, proportion...".⁴³ He backs up his statement with a personal interpretation of the history of paintings which connects Futurist work with the work of the 'primitives'. In particular Prampolini rejected the perspective and illusionism in painting that he considered antithetical to the mural form. The impression of space and volume could not be created by pictorial illusionism but instead is expressed by the natural properties of the new materials employed.

The surface is now animated by borders and independent chromatic planes. The formal elements are animated by the evocative power of an autonomous chiaroscuro. By not employing false perspective but, instead, utilising plastic values, the abstract language of architecture is humanised.⁴⁴

Innovative materials were fundamental for the new architecture. In the same way *plastica murale* deployed new materials. From this point of view it was completely different from a mural 'painting'. In some cases for example, the plaster was mixed with colours and the compositions were created by alternating layers of different colours. Moreover the urgency in overcoming the traditional means of painting and the new notion of total space were epitomized in the very notion of *plastica murale*. Working on a wall and not in the studio was mainly about reintroducing art into life, displacing the artists and repositioning them in a different context to create the work in the environment for which it was conceived. Art became site specific and the space of production was longer negotiable.

⁴³ Prampolini, "Al di là della pittura verso i polimaterici", p. 10. "La parola è oggi all'architettura. Per tutti gli artisti questa madre delle arti, fecondatrice di comunioni spirituali, ha il compito di riportare nella palestra delle arti plastiche una nuova passione per lo spazio costruito, per l'ordine, la misura, la proporzione al fine di esaltare un'animistica dell'attivismo contemporaneo".

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 10. "Le superfici si animano così dei contorni, indipendenti dai piani tonali e cromatici, e l'elemento formale interviene con la potenza evocatrice del chiaroscuro autonomo, cioè inteso non nella sua ingannevole prospettiva del volume, ma come valore plastico costruttivo, per rompere e contrastare ciò che potrebbe persistere di troppo geometrico, e umanizzare il linguaggio astratto delle superfici architettoniche".

An entire issue of *Stile Futurista* was dedicated to the first exhibition of *plastica murale* in Genoa and the publication includes the *manifesto polemico* signed by the Marinetti, Ambrosi, Andreoni, Benedetta, Depero, Dottori, Fillia, Oriani, Munari, Prampolini, Minor Rosso and Tato.⁴⁵ All the different theoretical components found a coherent expression in this Manifesto. Previously, in the Manifesto of Aerial Architecture, the Futurists stressed their association with Sant'Elia. In a similar way in the manifesto of *plastica murale* they claim their connection with Boccioni who is identified as the precursor of the theory of *plastica murale*. In some of his works Boccioni used a combination of different materials and theorized about the possible further development of this technique. Then, they continued stressing their legacy with Balla and Depero and their *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo* that expanded and amplified the decorative possibilities. Prampolini is then described as the first Futurist who, in his time, promoted his technique called *polimaterismo*. Unfailingly there is again a reference to Sant'Elia. According to the artists, the valid new modern architecture produced in the period had been ravaged by anachronistic and figurative wall paintings and frescoes. The wall, once plain and smooth, is revitalised by a combination of painting, sculpture and *plastica murale* that was "inspired by dynamic contemporary life, and by the interaction of volumes and space".⁴⁶ The artists identified *plastica murale* as a development of the Futurist aesthetic comparable to Aeropittura, Aeropoesia and Aeromusica "that expanded and spiritualised all the previous artistic researches."⁴⁷

In particular *plastica murale* was conceived for a wide range of new buildings in which artistic genius could be inspired and enhanced by the dynamism of modern life and in which the simultaneity of painting and sculpture paid particular attention to mechanical, scientific

⁴⁵ *Stile Futurista*, 1, n. 1, July 1934; *Stile Futurista*, 2, n. 15/16, December 1935.

⁴⁶ *Manifesto della Plastica Murale* (1934). ... "ispirata dalla vita dinamica contemporanea and dall'interazioni di volumi e spazio".

⁴⁷ Ibid. "che hanno allargato e spirituellizzato tutte le precedenti ricerche artistiche".

and technological developments. In the different points of the manifesto the authors explain that the *plastica murale* was suitable for dynamic modern life, that new buildings would be revitalised through relief of volumes. The development was made possible by the new industrial materials that were researched by scientists and artistic technique was no longer based on optical illusion as the traditional artistic means. The chemistry industry occupied an important role in their research making faith in the industrial, technological world and scientific discovery evident even in this part of their production. This again is part of a broader discourse on technology that informed different types of artistic production in Europe. Lefebvre explains that “in the context of the productive forces, the technological means and the specific problems of the modern world, things and objects could now be produced in their relationships, along with their relationships”.⁴⁸ With *plastica murale*, the Futurists attempted to create a unitary form of art that not only took aesthetic concerns into account but that also developed in parallel to industrial and technological production. Technology was also a new artistic theme explored in *plastica murale* and the manifesto celebrated aviation and flight of which *plastica murale* seemed to be the most suitable interpreter. The subjects in painting were a main concern for the artists: “If in the past the historical theme and nostalgia in painting resulted in the production of masterpieces this was due to the fact the man could deceive himself with the belief in his ability to revive heroism and distant feelings”.⁴⁹

A tangible demonstration of their intentions was the exhibition of the *plastica murale* organised in 1934. The exhibition was held in Genoa and curated by Fillia, Prampolini and De Filippis and was inaugurated on 14th November 1934 at 9pm at the Palazzo Ducale with

⁴⁸ Lefebvre, p. 124.

⁴⁹ “La plastica murale Futurista. Un manifesto polemico”, *Stile Futurista*, 1, n. 5, December 1934, p. 3. “Se un tempo il soggetto storico e la nostalgia del passato poterono produrre capolavori ciò si dovette all'umanità d'allora capace d'illudersi di poter rivivere eroismi e sentimenti lontani”.

the participation of Marinetti and under the patronage of Mussolini who, nevertheless, did not go to the opening. The 30 exhibiting artists presented works intended for sixteen different types of public and political buildings such as party headquarters, railway stations, post offices, airports, sports complexes and many others. According to Marinetti, Genoa was the perfect place to hold this exhibition because, with its important harbour, it embodied the 'mechanical fervour' and was a city free from any traditional or anachronistic element that could symbolise the commercial and military power. In the first pages of the catalogue Marinetti outlined the guidelines for the competition. A commission was put in charge of identifying the best works that then would be immediately created for the appropriate buildings. At the very beginning Marinetti underlines the significance of *plastica murale*:

*Plastica murale exceeds and abolishes the old mural painting and the frescos, [allowing artistic practices] to deploy every material and technique and experiment the numerous expressive and illustrative opportunities offered by the polimaterici and the plastiche-documentarie-parolelibere.*⁵⁰

The exhibition represented one of the few showcases where it was possible to view Futurist mural production. In fact despite the importance that the Futurists attributed to the connection between *plastica murale* and architecture and the promises of public and government officers, very few buildings were produced and the ones that were produced did not survive the Second World War. While some of the more traditional mural paintings have survived, it proved challenging to find practical applications for some of the forms of *plastica murale* that the Futurists presented in the exhibition. The catalogue of the exhibition does not include any critical essays but, inevitably, there is an introduction by Marinetti in which he primarily

⁵⁰ F.T. Marinetti, "Regolamento della prima mostra nazionale di plastica murale per l'edilizia Fascista", *Stile Futurista*, 1, n. 2, August 1934, p. 6. "La *plastica murale* supera e abolisce la vecchia pittura murale e gli affreschi, per spaziare nelle numerose possibilità espressive e illustrative offerte dai polimaterici e dalle simultaneità plastiche-documentarie-parolibere mediante l'uso di tutti i materiali e di tutte le tecniche".

criticises the contemporary manifestation of wall paintings and reconfirms the Futurist s' lead role in proposing new forms of art. The catalogue and photographs of the exhibition show a good degree of originality both in terms of layout of interiors and the works displayed. At the entrance to the exhibition was a monumental structure with the title of the exhibition designed by Prampolini and Rosso (Figure 72). The outside of the building was decorated with architectural elements including a monumental antenna and an elliptic construction 11 meters in height that highlighted the dissonance with the decorated ancient façade.⁵¹ The severe and austere architectural object contrasted with the opulently adorned façade of the building. Positioned parallel to the stairs the sign accompanied the visitor towards the internal space of the exhibition. The sign *Mostra Plastica Murale* applied to the structure created a play of geometric lines and volumes. The main hall was divided into two rows of stands on each side of a central aisle. The mural paintings were displayed on stands that resemble a sort of architecture with an intersection of planes and surfaces that created a rhythmic communication between the different sections of the exhibition space, despite the separation of the passage in the middle (Figure 73). From this point of view the exhibition seems to recreate the structure adopted in the previous Exhibition of Fascist Revolution where "dummy walls broke off right-angled corners, partial walls jutted out aggressively at odd angles; sculptural volumes and relieves pushed forward or backward off sloping panels; ceilings dropped, slanted or rose up; floors became illusionist."⁵² According to Schnapp the environment created for the Fascist show "produced a sense of perpetual movement and instability".⁵³ The same cannot be said for the exhibition of *plastica murale*. Although the fragmentation of the space into smaller, enclosed sections animated the space, the general

⁵¹ Dep ES9_P05 bis (MART Archive).

⁵² Jeffrey Schnapp, "Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution" in Richard J. Golsan ed. *Fascism, Aesthetics and Culture* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), p. 27.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

atmosphere was far from the bombardment of “visual/verbal/documentary information” described by Schnapp in reference to the 1932 exhibition.⁵⁴ In both events the internal space was reconstructed through the creation of illusory sections of different dimensions and scale. However in the *plastica murale* exhibition the aim seems to be the creation of a pure and meditative style. The essential structure, the regular rhythm of the display and the careful use of lights evoked the contemplative atmosphere emanating from some *aeropittura*. In the internal space there was an “absence of easels, frames and ceiling lamps, the soft light was diffused from an invisible source, giving the environment a new atmosphere, a grandeur that left visitors amazed and baffled at the orgy of violent colours and the strong presence of unusual forms”.⁵⁵

The Futurists strongly criticised the architect and artists of Novecento and other groups for producing modern and Rationalist indoor spaces and then filling them up with paintings and decorations that could have been mistaken for thirteenth-century works. With the exhibition of *plastica murale* they were risking making a similar mistake by proposing a clash between the modern internal decoration constituted of original design and industrial materials with the structure of the Palazzo Ducale in Genoa. While choosing Genoa seemed an almost obvious choice, holding the exhibition in the “ancient Palazzo Ducale”⁵⁶ was considered incongruous unless the environment was transformed to house this new form of art. The rooms were emptied of the paintings and sculptures that normally populated the rooms. Floors, walls and ceilings were covered to provide a barren and clean space adapted to host this new form of art. The ornate ceiling of the *Sala del Consiglio* of the Palazzo Ducale was covered with 576 square meters of white cloth and the walls with 980 square meters of jute cloth.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁵ Salvatore Ventura, *L'aeropittore Futurista Tato e le vere origini del Manifesto dell'Aeropittura* (Place and publisher not given, after 1990), p. 25.

⁵⁶ Virginia Gramegna Frescura “La mostra di plastica murale a Genova”, Dep_ES9_P20 (MART Archive).

⁵⁷ Dep ES9_P05 bis (MART Archive).

catalogue includes photographs of some the works with the list indicating the material used for each of them. There are a great variety of materials such as wood, metal, ceramic, steel, iron, linoleum, 'cromoalluminio', 'celbes', marble, glass, bronze, plastics, 'silexine', 'plastolite' etc. At the end of the exhibition catalogue there are a few pages listing all the companies that produced materials alongside advertisements for their products. This shows not only that the Futurists needed some sort of sponsorship to organise the exhibition but also the importance that the variety of materials had in their art and in particular the new products of industry. The use of ceramics was very popular in this region, and in the town of Albisola nearby Genoa, Marinetti and the aeropainter Tullio d'Albisola published a manifesto in 1938 entitled "Ceramica and Aeroceramica." The exhibition attracted the attention of the press and here the changes undertaken by the internal ambience had a striking effect on the viewer:

The floor surfaces of blue linoleum, an arrangement of volumes through moving silver walls and a discreet light diffused from invisible sources resulted in a revolutionary [visual] miracle. The absence of everything that was superfluous - from the frames to the easels and ceiling lamps - gives new appearance to the gigantic hall, in a fascinatingly exemplary way.⁵⁸

The covering of the walls and the floors must have impressed the critics who were not used to witnessing these sorts of effects: "The ambience is presented as an enormous box of *cel-bex* (a mural covering of Italian manufacturing) enclosed and in a blue-grey tone resembling the colour of the uniformed air force".⁵⁹ Light played a key role in this exhibition: "it is a calm, safe light that inundates, shapes and details without offending or overwhelming; it overflows

⁵⁸ Virginia Gramegna Frescura, Dep_ES9_P20 (MART Archive). "E la rivoluzione si è tradotta in un miracolo poichè un tappeto di linoleum azzurro, una volumetria di pareti mobili argente, un luce discreta che si diffonde da sorgenti invisibili, l'assenza di tutto ciò che è superfluo, dalla cornice al cavalletto al lampadario, danno al salone enorme un aspetto nuovo, fascinantemente esemplare".

⁵⁹ Uberto Zuccardi Merli "Uno sguardo alla mostra di plastica murale", *Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 22 Novembre 1934, Fortunato Depero Collection, E.S.IX, (MART Archive), p. 16. "L'ambiente si presenta come una enorme scatola in *cel-bex* (rivestimento murale composto di marca nostrana) chiusa e di un color prevalentemente grigio-azzurro quale quello delle uniformi della flotta del cielo".

steady like a man who is treading his infallible path towards the future”.⁶⁰ The source of light came from 30 hidden headlamps scattered around the room. An unusual form of light was also deployed for the imposing work *Ritmi ascensionali delle forze Fasciste* (Ascensional Rhythms of the Fascist Forces) by Enrico Prampolini that seems to have been the central focus of the exhibition and was displayed on the far end wall of the room (Figure 75). The subject is a series of *gagliardetti* (small flags) represented pointing towards the upper space of the painting where they eventually join together to form the shape of an aeroplane. Although the subject can be perceived by observing the painting from a close position, from a distance the work probably appeared, in its geometric luminosity, as an architectural component, the focus and the main source of light in the exhibition space. At the back the work blue glass plates were applied, allowing it to be lit from behind while on the side a high column representing the *fascio*, symbol of the Fascist regime, was made up of luminous tubes of *holofan*. The work conveys a great degree of dynamism and was a focal point in the room. The presence of the *fascio* shows how in this exhibition the political undertones were quite strong. Most of the works’ titles are related to Fascist themes and the buildings for which these works were conceived were openly related to the activities and propaganda of the Fascist party. Nevertheless, the general structure of the exhibition and some of the works showed a high degree of innovation in their multi-media nature and architectural components. The artists borrowed and appropriated materials typically associated with architecture to create a decoration that resembled architecture itself. This decoration aimed to shape the space and create forms and volumes rather than merely providing the illusion of forms and volumes by the deployment of false perspective. The *plastica murale* was to provide lyricism and spirituality to architecture, characteristics that, according to the Futurists, were

⁶⁰ Ibid. “...luce calma, sicura, tale che indonda, scopisce, dettaglia senza offendere senza sovrabbondare, dilaga sicura, come la tranquillità dell’uomo che calchi il suo infallibile cammino verso il futuro”.

impossible to find within modern and rational architecture alone. Fillia, Oriani and Rosso produced around twenty sketches deploying materials such as black enamel, silicon, ceramic, steel and glass. Despite this, their works were criticised for not being clearly integrated into a specific architectural structure and the need to create a model of architecture in the exhibition was repeatedly stressed.⁶¹ The innovative nature of these works however, was undoubted. The works often included materials in relief where the geometrical forms are alternated with stylised figures representing the human body and the sketches were produced in a similar style to *Aeropittura* with the indications of the materials to be used for architectural purposes. *La conquista dello spazio* (The Conquest of Space) a result of a collaboration between the artists Fillia, Oriani and Rosso is one of the most interesting works from the exhibition (Figure 74). On a background of tarmac, which almost resembles some form of organic substance, the artists placed the representation of a sphere at the bottom of the composition and a wire to surround the entire work. The spiral shape, included in the composition, can be interpreted as an attempt to describe a form of movement although this clashes against the presence of tarmac that convey the impression of immobility and motionless. While the room with the suffused illumination provides an almost meditative environment, the works are very solid and architectural.

The success of this exhibition led to the organisation of a similar event two years later in 1936 at the Mercati Traianei in Rome. The choice of the location for this second event does not appear to be discussed in the documents and indeed it is less obvious. To some extent holding an exhibition in a roman archaeological site seems to be a negation of the character of modernity that informed the choice of Genoa. However, it appears that the initially intention was to hold the exhibition in Genoa again. In an article published in *Stile Futurista* in 1935 Marinetti announced the organisation of the second exhibition of *plastica murale* in Genoa

⁶¹ Dep_ES9_P06 (MART Archive).

but clearly at some point there must have been a change of plan.⁶² Fillia was involved in the preparation of the second exhibition, mentioning that the plans for the new event were in place without specifying the location. The artist died before the exhibition took place in October and November 1936 and the show was curated by De Filippis, Prampolini and Celesia. The colonial politics in Africa and the maritime trade provided one of the themes for the works exhibited and the competition reflected developments in the colonial politics of the regime. As with the earlier exhibition, the other themes were mainly urbanism and aviation. The principles expressed in the catalogue are similar to the guidelines deployed for the first event, although it was criticised for a limited degree of creative invention and for paying more attention to the many rules around the competition. Prampolini seems to have thought differently and claimed that there had been qualitative progress and an affirmation of successful artistic and technical results compared with the previous exhibition.⁶³ The photograph of the central hall reproduced in the catalogue shows a more traditional and severe environment where the works are conventionally placed against the wall and there is no particular attention to create an architectural space.⁶⁴ Prampolini was again in charge of producing the work, entitled *Sintesi dell'Africa* (Synthesis of Africa), which occupies the space on the far wall of the hall (Figure 76). The political reference was stronger in this exhibition and the entrance hall was occupied by a sculptural representation of Mussolini:

Dominated by the powerful figure of the Duce – a robust and synthetic sculpture by Carnassi created for the Casa dei Balilla in La Spezia – the works are aligned along the walls of this elegant hall, with simple and severe lines, decorated only by wall inscriptions and by a big composition that occupies the entire wall celebrating the most

⁶² Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Seconda mostra nazionale di plastica murale per l'edilizia Fascista-Genova", *Stile Futurista*, II, May 1938, p. 8.

⁶³ Enrico Prampolini, "La II mostra di plastica murale", *La Rivista Illustrata del Popolo*, 1936 published in Simonetta Lux ed. *Avanguardia e tradizione tra le due guerre. Itinerari attraverso un ventennio di dibattito sulla pittura e plastica murale* (Rome: Bagatto Libri, 1990), pp. 398-401.

⁶⁴ Movimento Futurista, *Seconda mostra nazionale di plastica murale per l'edilizia Fascista in Italia e Africa* (Rome: Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia, [1936]).

important event, the glorious epilogue of the Fascist revolution: the foundation of the empire.⁶⁵

The catalogue is much briefer than of the previous exhibition, and the manifesto of *plastica murale* was republished as an introduction. In the last section, the catalogue listed all the works that were exhibited. Unfortunately it contains significantly fewer reproductions of works compared with the catalogue for the first exhibition. *Transporti marittimi* (Figure 77 - Maritime Transports) by Fillia, a mosaic in ceramics, is one of the works illustrated in the catalogue. The inclusion of this work can probably be interpreted as a form of commemoration of the artist who died before the opening of the exhibition. A gigantic ship at the centre of the composition and some industrial buildings at the bottom left are the main figurative elements in the mosaics whose reproduction appears at the beginning of the catalogue and was praised for its uniqueness and coherence of colours: “despite their peremptory immanence, the realistic references – ships and factories – are dissolved in an ambience of chromatic transitions and resolve in an interpenetration of planes that emphasise the plastic and lyrical values of the composition”.⁶⁶ On the right wall of the central hall, the artists Benedetta, Ambrosi and Tato created the *vetrata artistica polimaterica* (glass wall) entitled *Comunicazioni ferroviarie* illustrating dynamic lines and roads representing railways that converge in the centre, which represents Palazzo Venezia in Rome, headquarter of the Fascist party. While the use of glass seems to be more reminiscent of a long standing artistic tradition, the work by Prampolini, Oriani and Mino Rosso, *Radiopostaltelegrafico*,

⁶⁵ Vittorio Orazi, “La II mostra nazionale di plastica murale e le nuove possibilità della tecnica plastica”, CRA. 1.387 (MART Archive) published in *Provincia di Como*, [11 dicembre 1936] “Dominata dalla possente del Duce – robusta e vigorosamente sintetica scultura del Carmassi, destinata alla Casa dei Balilla di Spezia – le opere si allineano lungo le pareti di questo elegante salone, dalle linee semplici e severe, decorato solo da lapidarie iscrizioni parietali e da una grande composizione che occupa tutto la parete di fondo celebrante il massimo avvenimento, l’epilogo glorioso della rivoluzione Fascista; la fondazione dell’impero”.

⁶⁶ Ibid. “I riferimenti realistici – navi, officine – pur nella loro perentoria immanenza si dissolvono in un ambiente di delicate trapassi cromatici e si risolvono in una compenetrazione di piani che pone in rilievo i valori plastici e lirici della composizione”.

exploring the notion and effect of different forms of communication, epitomized the archetype of *polimaterico*. Presenting a composition made of glass, wood, ceramic and steel, the work was perceived as “the accomplished translation into reality of the theory of the *plastica murale*”.⁶⁷ The power of suggestion resulting from the original composition and the scale of these works, in some cases occupying a surface as large as twenty five square meters, does not compensate for the significantly less attention paid to the creation of an original spatial environment.

Even in this exhibition, and in contrast to the contemporary theories on mural painting elaborated by artists who belonged to other movements, significant attention was paid to the role of the artist as a creative force. Dottori explains that the artist “re-appropriates his role of organising the ambiances and indoor architectural spaces, conferring a character and a harmony coherent with the modernity of the building”.⁶⁸ As previously mentioned, the use of different materials in art was highlighted by Prampolini in several articles and essays and fully theorized in *Arte polimaterica* in 1941. In this essay Prampolini stresses the importance of the environment and the function of a particular space claiming the *polimaterismo* was not simply a technique but a proper means of artistic expression. Important for Prampolini was the idea, previously introduced by Le Corbusier and Gropius, of abolishing decoration and instead elevating the atmosphere of an environment without the deployment of painting and sculpture. Although artists’ intentions seem clear, it can appear difficult to distinguish between what should be interpreted as a decorative object or alternatively, a constructive constituent. Prampolini discusses his theories including both the dimension and the experience of a particular ambience and how you affect on that ambience with the use of

⁶⁷ Ibid. “.....la trasformazione in realtà della plastica murale”.

⁶⁸ Gerardo Dottori, “La II mostra di plastica murale ai Mercati Traianei” di Gerardo Dottori, *L'Ora*, [10 dicembre 1936], CRA.1.384 (MART Archive). “...[l’artista] riprende il suo ruolo che è quello di organizzare l’ambiente interno, conferendogli quel carattere e quell’armonia che saranno più in accordo con la modernità architettonica dell’edificio”.

alternative material. For example, the power of suggestion that the Futurists recognised in the art of the primitives was a consequence of a particular process of artistic production that did not force the artist to abstract an idea and reproduce it on a small canvas. Instead they could freely occupy a large space that was also the final location of the work. Moreover the Futurists in this later period seem to have a problematic relationship with the canvas, feeling that it was a limitation to their creativity. The spiritual idea that informed their art forced the artists to meditate not only on how to extend the canvas but also as to propose an art production that could have an essence and extend in depth:

The canvas deceives: it extends over a surface, while anything with a real meaning expands in depth including the act of thinking. Traditional painting cannot convey the ideal depth because it cannot avoid substantiating it in forms or figures that become mere symbols and remain conventional and static.⁶⁹

Although Prampolini, through deploying *polimaterismo*, was in fact advocating the idea of expanding artistic practices beyond conventional boundaries, this idea of enlarging physical boundaries was only one aspect of a more general attitude that developed throughout the entire period of Futurist artistic production.

The idea of a broad engagement with artistic experience has always been part of the Futurist ideology for which involving the spectator in the representation implied more than simply engaging him or her in a visual experience. In 1921 Marinetti published a manifesto of *Tattilismo* in which he theorized an artistic practice mainly concerned with tactile gesture and sensations:

⁶⁹ [A.] Silvi Antonini, "Il superamento della pittura", *Artecrazia*, 5, n. 88, 21-27, December 1936, p. 1. "Il quadro, possiamo riconoscerlo anche noi, è una finzione: esso si stende in superficie, mentre tutto, che abbia essenza, si stende in profondità. Anche il pensiero: in una profondità ideale che la pittura tradizionale non rende perché non può evitare di sostanziarlo in forme o figure le quali rischiano di diventare simboli e restano in ogni modo convenzionali e statiche".

I began my own tactile education by submitting my sense of touch to intensive therapy, localizing the confused phenomena of will and thought on the different parts of my body and especially on the palms of my hands. This education was slow, but also easy and all healthy bodies can use this education to get precise and surprising results.⁷⁰

The practical applications of *plastica murale* were very limited. In La Spezia, near Genoa, ceramics were used by Fillia and Prampolini for the interior decoration of the public building the Palazzo delle Poste in 1933. The building is a creation of the architect Angiolo Mazzoni and Fillia and Prampolini were responsible for the production of the mosaic in the tower. The work is entitled *Comunicazioni* (Figure 78 - Communications, 1933) and encompasses terrestrial, aerial and maritime forms of communications. The artists created a colourful mosaic that contrasts with the red bricks of the tower. The themes, mainly related to transport and communications, include the depiction of graphic figures of aeroplanes and ships. The mosaic does not cover the entire wall of the tower and its irregular and wavy borders, with some of the wall's surface left uncovered, convey the impression of observing not an applied decoration but a constructive component of the building. At the very top of the mosaic, instead of differentiating the decoration by the deployment of colours, the reds and browns of the mural fuse with the design of the material of the building. The varied tones of bright blue and the undulating edge of the mosaic contribute to creating a sense of dynamism and movement that contrast with the monotonous red of the brickwork and the severe structure of the tower.

Another example of *plastica murale* is a project carried out by some *aeropittori* with the architect Nicola Mosso in *Casa Cervo*, a residential complex planned in 1934. Although the building was only partly completed, Fillia, Oriani and Rosso designed the *plastica murale*

⁷⁰ *Manifesto del Tattilismo* (1921). "Ho cominciato col sottoporre il mio tatto ad una cura intensive, localizzando i fenomeni confuse della volontà e del pensiero su diversi punti del mio corpo e particolarmente sul palmo delle mani. Questa educazione è lenta ma facile e tutti i corpi sani possono dare, mediante questa educazione, risultati sorprendenti e precisi".

that were to be located in different areas of the construction, for example on the side walls of the balconies. Sketches and examples of this *plastica murale* are in Turin at the museum of architecture (Figure 79). The colourful and graceful temperas now in the museum are probably different from the thick substances such as concrete that were planned. Nevertheless, the sketches are useful for getting a sense of the figurative language that the artists wanted to deploy. The works by Fillia, Pippo Oriani and Mino Rosso consist of rectangular and trapezoidal shapes superimposed upon each other in different bright colours and juxtaposed to circular and organic shapes, a compositional scheme recurrent in Aeropittura's artistic language.

Despite the extensive theorisation provided by the artists in reference to *plastica murale*, the claim to being an original means of artistic expression can be problematic if examined within the practical limitations imposed on the production. The aim of an artistic production that was site specific did not always find practical application and the fact that the contemporary experience of *plastica murale* is often via sketches and photographs demonstrates the transient nature of this artistic practice. Moreover, in some cases, the artists had to physically apply their works to an existent building or structure contradicting the fundamental principles of decoration as a constructive element generated simultaneously with the architecture. Occasionally, the sketches only represented an intention and, in the case of some of the works in the exhibition of *plastica murale*, the final product both in its size and materials was never created. In a sense, it was an uncompleted attempt. However, these works were not only important influences on post-war artists such as Fontana and Burri but they also sanctioned some of the constant preoccupations of the Futurists for example the notion of space in artistic practices. *Plastica murale* substantiated the Futurist necessity of expanding the notion of space beyond painting encompassing a different range of techniques and material. Also, space was not just an element that could be represented or interpreted in painting but it would

be shaped or created through the combination of different artistic practices including architecture, as the exhibitions demonstrate. The site specificity of these works caused a displacement of the artist from his studio to a diverse and ever-changing setting in which the transient nature of the works was not a negative but an added value in the artists' yearning for an enlarged and alternative experience of space. This notion of a different form of artistic experience can also be discussed in reference to the mysticism that informed the works of late Futurism.

The Profane Religion

The Futurists attempted to deploy paintings and architecture simultaneously in different spheres of their production including religious architecture and artworks. Although they were very prolific in publishing theoretical documents that considered religious themes with reference to paintings, architecture, interior design and decoration the practical architectural applications were very limited. This interest in the religious theme occurred almost simultaneously with their production of *plastica murale*.

Futurist religious art of the 1930s can easily be interpreted as a celebration of the Lateranensi Pacts signed between the Vatican and Mussolini in 1929. Although always reluctant to accept the Vatican and its influence on Italian society, the Futurists claimed that their theories were of particular relevance to Catholic religious art because the Futurist aesthetic tended towards the monumental, costly and decorative and was therefore not suitable for the more spartan principle of Protestantism. In 1931 the Manifesto of Sacred Art was published and this theme was extensively examined in Futurist periodicals. For example in the same page of an issue of

Stile Futurista, “The New Religious Architecture” and “Sacred Painting of our Time” examined the concept of religion in both architecture and painting.⁷¹

However, before an analysis of how religious art production in late Futurism is informed by some general theories on the new perception and reproduction of space can be undertaken, it is important to underline that, once again, the Futurist interest in religious themes and mysticism was not something only related to the new political climate but also represented a form of continuity with previous artistic and literary manifestations. The text *Futurismo esoterico* by Simona Cigliana traces the origin of and interest in esoteric practices in the relationship and influences between Futurism and Symbolism, and the notion of intuition as a fundamental principle in the Futurist ideology.

Giving space to intuition, overcoming the boundaries of matter, opening to a new form of visionary objectivity were all aims already prefigured in an historic tradition and they attained new power from the studies of illustrious scientists who, between the end of eighteenth and beginning of nineteenth century, extensively investigated the paranormal psychology.⁷²

Interestingly, the connection with the new science seems to find a new strand of research in which occultism becomes an alternative to a negative perception of science: “the impatience for a method of thought and science that, although originally aiming to be objective, analytic and impartial ended up perceived as pedantic and feeble”.⁷³ Lino Cappuccio in his periodical *Nuovo Futurismo* extensively discussed the idea of science and occultism describing them as

⁷¹ Fillia, “La nuova architettura religiosa” and [L.C.] “Pittura sacra del nostro tempo”, *Stile Futurista*, II, March 1935, pp. 10-11.

⁷² Simona Cigliana, *Futurismo esoterico: contributi per una storia dell'irrazionalismo italiano tra otto e novecento* (Napoli: Liguori, 2002), p. 328. “Dare spazio all'intuizione, oltrepassare i confini della materia, aprire la strada ad una nuova oggettività, tutta visionaria, queste mete, già prefigurate da una antichissima tradizione traggono nuovo vigore dai dubbi e dagli studi di illustri scienziati che tra la fine dell'ottocento e i primi del novecento si sono occupati a lungo di psicologia supernormale”.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 74. “....l'insofferenza per un metodo di pensiero e l'insofferenza per un habitus scientifico che in origine voleva essere obiettivo, analitico imparziale e rigoroso ma che aveva finito col risultare pedante e come asfittico”.

two forces that ran parallel and had many common characteristics. In the article “Scienze occulte o scienze esatte?”⁷⁴ he invited everyone interested in, or a specialist on, occult phenomena to get in contact with the editor. In this way *Nuovo Futurismo* could become an impartial platform for scientific discussion of these experiences. The idea of being able to approach these phenomena in a scientific way seems to be central:

It is time for science to become more dynamic and efficient abandoning that tradition of slowness and pedantry in order to be more in touch with those new realities of phenomena that, even today, in our very civilised twentieth century, are neglected and left to the margin between science and slavish foolishness.⁷⁵

In a sense, the interest in a new form of science discussed in the previous chapter also opened the door to a more overt interest in occultism and mysticism. To some extent the new methods and discoveries in science and physics, the pantheistic approach to nature, the overwhelming application of technology and a new religious and mystical feeling appears to converge in Aeropittura artistic production. This form of spirituality in its utopian dimension, including religiosity, represents only one aspect of the imaginative and mysterious world in which these artists were fascinated. Arnaldo Ginna in *Il Nuovo* discussed the need for a new approach to science and medicine, and the journal included a contribution by a thaumaturge and healer discussing the ambiguous relationship between occultism, superstition and science.⁷⁶ Cinaglia continues:

In this world of unknown in which it seemed possible to see eventually a small opening, a whole world of still not understood phenomena that were situated in an intersection between physics and

⁷⁴ Lino Cappuccio, “Scienze occulte o scienze esatte”, *Nuovo Futurismo*, 15 December 1934, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 4 “È ora infatti che la scienza, per così dire ufficiale si snellisca, si stacchi dalla sua tradizione di lentezza e di pedanteria, per mettersi decisamente a contatto con quelle nuove realtà con quelle nuove classi di fenomeni che ancor’oggi, nel nostro civilissimo ventesimo secolo, sono trascurate e lasciate sui margini fra la scienza e la ciarlataneria”.

⁷⁶ Arnaldo Ginna, “Il fallimento della medicina?”, *Il Nuovo*, 25 March 1934, p. 3; Ettore Florian Petrausch, “Le meraviglie di un mondo invisibile”, *Il Nuovo*, 25 March 1934, p. 4.

metaphysics in the Futurist perspective, in an ambit of matters and subtle energies that we could call hyper-physics. In reference to the description of this world, the scientist and the esoterist did not seem, from a synthetic point of view, to be so distant.⁷⁷

The concept of spirituality was particularly embedded in Aeropittura's ideology. This applies even to *plastica murale*. Fillia describes this technique as the "synthesis of spiritual value that could not be expressed by architectural principles of mass and volume alone".⁷⁸ In 1933 the article "Arte e Religione" explains their notion of religiosity:

Religion is not just a collection of rites that human societies observe in order to pay honour to the divinity, but it is rather an abstraction of the soul from everything that is vulgar in life. The ascension of the soul to the superior spiritual spheres is logically the most sublime thing our mind can conceive.⁷⁹

Religious symbols were more effective to describe a state of mind and a general feeling of spirituality than devotion to God or the Saints. Christine Poggi in her essay "The Return of the Repressed" quotes Fillia's words: "We understand art to have a spiritual function, to be a means of rendering images of the mysteries of the superhuman world. Man needs to detach himself from earth, to dream, to desire eternal happiness, continually to forget everyday life".⁸⁰ She claims that Futurist religious works demonstrate the artists' awareness of Fascism's failure to reach its goals in terms of social order. "For Fillia, Benedetta and others fulfilment of the desire for social happiness and spiritual transcendence could never be convincingly pictured in

⁷⁷ Cigliana, p. 328. "In questo ignoto sul qual sembrava essersi finalmente aperto uno spiraglio rientrava tutto un mondo di fenomeni ancora non ben compresi, che si situavano anche per i Futuristi nel punto di intersezione tra fisica e metafisica, in un ambito di materie e di energie sottili che potremmo chiamare superfisico. Sulla descrizione di questo mondo, lo scienziato e l'esoterista parevano, ad un sintetico sguardo, non essere del tutto distaccati".

⁷⁸ Fillia, "Architettura e plastica murale", *La Città Nuova*, n. 1, 1934, p. 6. "Intendo per pittura murale la sintesi dei valori spirituali che il solo movimento architettonico delle masse e degli oggetti non può raggiungere".

⁷⁹ (Futur.), "Arte e religione", *Futurismo*, 12 February 1933, p. 1. "La religione non come insieme di riti che un uomo o una società umana osserva per rendere onore alla divinità ma come astrazione dell'anima da tutto ciò che costituisce la volgarità della vita e ascensione quindi alle superiori sfere della più assoluta spiritualità è logicamente quanto di più sublime possa concepire la nostra mente".

⁸⁰ Christine Poggi, "The Return of the Repressed" in Claudia Lazzaro and Roger Crum eds. *Donatello among the Blackshirts* (London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 220.

the present, instead it was projected into the future and took the form of mystical faith".⁸¹ The praise of the regime in any publication, article or event that took place in the 1930s makes it very difficult to speculate about the artists' desire for evasion and their conviction about the failure of the regime. Instead of a desire for a new social order, this 'mystical faith' can be linked to something very profane, namely their artistic creativity.

It is very interesting that the artists use the word 'revelation' when referring to the machine. This is also one of the key terms that Lionello Venturi, in his book *Il gusto dei Primitivi*, uses in his analysis of so-called 'primitive art'. The book was first published in 1926, was very influential and despite the fact that Venturi deeply hated them, the Futurists were fascinated by his work. Like other artists of the period such as Carlo Carrà and Giorgio De Chirico, they admired Giotto's art and they were particularly fascinated by the Scrovegni Chapel where the evident 'synthesis' of masses and volumes, which prompted Venturi to draw a link between Giotto and Cézanne, constituted a source of inspiration. Prampolini discusses "the suggestive power of the primitive 'plastic' language. [...] The primitives through their contact with God, earth, plastic image and architecture understood the human duty of art".⁸² In an article published in *Futurismo*, Dottori explained that it was not necessary for the artist to be a specialist in a particular genre or theme, so it was perfectly acceptable that the Futurists were also experimenting in religious art:

The three Futurist painters who present some essays on religious painting have to be considered in this field as the primitives of a renewed sensibility. Fillia, Oriani and Dottori are linked to the painter of the twelfth and thirteenth century for this sensibility that is expressed though by men who have five or six centuries of experience. Primitives, but of our time.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 220.

⁸² Prampolini, *Arte polimaterica*, p. 5. "...la potenza suggestiva del linguaggio plastico dei primitivi [...] di coloro cioè che a contatto con Dio o con la terra, avevano veramente compresa il compito umano dell'arte".

⁸³ "Arte Sacra Futurista", *Futurismo*, 22 January, 1933 p. 1. "I tre pittori Futuristi che presentano alcuni saggi di pittura religiosa sono in questo campo da considerarsi come i primitivi di una sensibilità rinnovata. Fillia, Oriani,

The artists stated that Futurist sacred art attempted to bring back the problem of the image from simple human imitation to the rebirth of the divine and the miraculous that it is not necessarily a religious symbol. In their manifesto of sacred art they even claim to be anticlerical and that it is not necessary to be fervently religious to produce Futurist sacred art. Religious art, as any other aspect of people's life, needs to be renovated but "only the aeropainters, masters of the aerial perspective, can plastically express the unfathomable fascination and the blissful transparencies of the infinite".⁸⁴ The religious symbol was primarily valued for the formal possibilities that it offered. By examining the manifesto it becomes clear why it has always been looked upon with suspicion. Although the argument involves sacred art it seems very much like a marketing operation in which the Futurists advertise their ability to represent miracles, angels and saints. Thus more than a religious mysticism the works seem to be informed by the idea of utopia that, in this particular context, acquires a more mystic connotation. The overwhelming feelings experienced by Le Corbusier in front of the grandiosity of the Parthenon appear to be very similar to the overwhelming fascination that the power of technology provided for Futurism. It is important to remember that not only did the Le Corbusier entertain a regular relationship with Italy at the time but also that the Futurists and the Italian architects constantly discussed his theories in the periodicals of the time. Le Corbusier himself draws the parallel between the impression of this monumental architecture and the machine when he states that "all this plastic machinery is realised in marble with the rigour that we have learned to apply in the machine. The impression of naked polished steel".⁸⁵

In this particular case, Le Corbusier is not discussing the machine in reference to its function as

Dottori si riallacciano ai pittori del due-trecento per questa sensibilità che è espressa però da uomini che hanno in più l'esperienza di cinque o sei secoli. Primitivi ma del nostro tempo".

⁸⁴ *Manifesto dell'Arte Sacra Futurista* (1931). "Soltanto gli aeropittori futuristi, maestri delle prospettive aeree e abituati a dipingere in volo dall'alto, possono esprimere plasticamente il fascino abissale e le trasparenze beate dell'infinito".

⁸⁵ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1946) p. 217.

machine à habiter; instead, he describes an almost irrational physical reaction to at the sight of the mechanical element. Le Corbusier describes a sort of mystic aura around the technological means. He draws the parallel between this feeling and architecture:

We may affirm that the aeroplane mobilised invention, intelligence and daring: imagination and cold reason. It is the same spirit that built the Parthenon. [...] Here is something to arouse emotion. We are in the inexorable realm of the mechanical. There are no symbols attached to these forms: they provoke definite sensation; there is no need of a key in order to understand them. Brutality, intensity, the utmost sweetness, delicacy and great strength.⁸⁶

Anthony Vidler states that “Le Corbusier was left crushed by the superhuman aspect of things on the acropolis, transcendent space, fourth dimension, oceanic, religious in nature. Parthenon as a brutal machine, terrifying sublime....”.⁸⁷ And in accordance with some of Le Corbusier’s principles Fillia affirms:

The machine generates a new spirituality. It is absurd to consider it lacking in mystery because it was produced by man: the man was forced to invent the machine that can be considered as a ‘revelation’. The spiritual components of the machine transcend the material elements and animate the human being with a real force of divinity. Today we are awaiting the miracle of our happiness from the machine. It is the miracle that has to free us from physical oppression so we can raise ourselves to the ecstasy of eternity.⁸⁸

However, Le Corbusier precisely points out the origin of this mystical and spiritual feeling:

Here, the purest witness to the physiology of sensation, and to the mathematical speculation attached to it, is fixed and determined: we

⁸⁶ Le Corbusier, pp. 109, 211.

⁸⁷ Anthony Vidler, *Warped space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2002), pp. 51-52.

⁸⁸ Fillia, “Spiritualità Futurista”, *Oggi e Domani*, Rome, 26 October 1931, p. 5. “La macchina genera una nuova spiritualità. È assurdo crederla priva di misteri perchè creata dall’uomo: l’uomo è stato costretto ad inventare la macchina che noi possiamo considerare come una ‘rivelazione’. I fattori spirituali della Macchina trascendono gli elementi materiali ed animano l’uomo con una vera forza di divinità. Oggi noi, nessuno escluso, attendiamo dalla macchina il miracolo della nostra felicità – il miracolo deve liberarci dall’oppressione della vita fisica ed innalzarci, in un prossimo domani all’estasi dell’eternità”.

are riveted by our senses; we are ravished in our minds; we touch the axis of harmony. No question of religious dogma enters in; no symbolical description, no naturalistic representation; there is nothing but pure forms in precise relationship.⁸⁹

It is a profane version of the traditional religious feeling. Similarly, the Futurists attempted to recreate an atmosphere of mysticism and the sublime by transforming the mystical feeling that they had towards the machine into a 'profane' religious feeling.

Once again their passion for the aeroplane and technology is an essential part of their belief; in this particular case their religious belief. As discussed above the aeroplane became the means to introduce a different perspective on architecture and the city. Architecture became the contact and mediator between earth and sky. They wanted to create an architectural style that could convey the idea of the loss of gravity. Oriani states that the architect fights against weight to conquer aerial space and Fiorini's *Tensistruttura* was a sort of technique aiming to defeat the heaviness of the structure and allow the construction of imposing and high buildings. Prampolini says they wanted to overcome the terrestrial borders and reach the cosmic dimension. This desire to get in touch with an unknown space and dimension developed into the creation of symbols of supernatural entity. In particular, around the mid-1930s, Futurist artists tried to generate the feeling of mysticism and the sublime in every aspect of their art, architecture included.

Their religious buildings like any other form of architecture had to be modern monumental triumphs of steel, concrete, glass, severity in construction and the interaction of volumes giving the composition an original rhythm. It had to interpret the aerial sense and combine dynamism and plasticity. Inside the building the light originated from the reflection of the materials to shape the space. Thus the attention is once again paid to both internal and external space, colours and materials. Sartoris claims that "independently from mural

⁸⁹ Le Corbusier, p. 217.

decoration [...] colour is an important element of architecture” and he did not simply refer to “colour lent by ornamentation, but rather to the pure colour offered by the different materials”.⁹⁰ The characteristics of this architecture are similar to the general principles of artistic creation proposed by the Futurists: the basic, primitive and synthetic elements, strong contrasts of volumes and light and the colours of different materials. In general the religious architecture that they proposed was criticised by the Vatican and the secular and occasionally profane tone that pervaded their theories did not help to make them credible and accepted by the Church.

Futurist religious painting attempted to implement of certain architectural principles to produce a new entity that could join together the characteristics of monumentality: the use of alternative materials, colours, the creation of masses in a mystical and mysterious atmosphere. Moreover, the architectural references were deployed to convey further meanings. Poggi, in her visual analysis of Fillia’s work *La sacra famiglia* (Figure 48 - The Holy Family, 1931) explains that the artist, through an explicit reference to contemporary and past architectural symbols, was attempting to find a form of reconciliation between past and present:

We find fragments of skyscrapers clustered together with parts of a Roman aqueduct, a classical temple facade, a domed structure that probably alludes to the vernacular shrines of Libya – Italian colony in North Africa. References to the continuity of the past in the present coexist with references to the geographical range of the regime’s dream of a Mediterranean empire.⁹¹

In these works the Futurists not only referred to an outer dimension, symbolically translating the notion of cosmic space into spiritual values, but they also physically inserted architectural

⁹⁰ Alberto Sartoris, “Gli interni delle nuove chiese”, *Stile Futurista*, II, March 1935, p. 11. “Indipendentemente dalla decorazione murale propriamente detta, mai un’architettura come la nostra ha dato così larga parte all’elemento ‘colore’ e usando questo termine non ci riferiamo unicamente al colore locale o all’ornamentazione ma al colore puro in se stesso che offrono i diversi materiali di cui l’architetto può disporre al giorno d’oggi”.

⁹¹ Poggi, p. 256.

elements to recreate the idea of an all encompassing space discussed in reference to the exhibition space. The language and the compositional schemes of these works are often very similar to the figurative material developed in *plastica murale*. In works such as *Natività* (Figure 80 - Nativity, 1932-1933) by Fillia and *Paradiso perduto* (Figure 34 - Paradise Lost, 1931-32) by Mino delle Site the artists immersed the compositional element of the painting into a sort of monumental and primordial atmosphere. In Fillia's work the rock in the background reminds one of a pyramid with its mystical and mysterious connotations. The appearance of the block resembles a natural element with its rough surface that may be reminiscent of stone or concrete. Poggi interprets the mass of rock in connection with the idea of a mountain, describing how in Fillia's work, it functions "as a traditional cult object, to promote a sense of authority, inviolability and truth".⁹² In this work as well as in the *L'adorazione* (The Adoration, 1931) the sphere reappears as a symbolic element and measure of a human being juxtaposed with the divine entity. The shape of a cross, a recurrent religious symbol in these works, is often modified, the horizontal arms extended in order to resemble a representation of an aeroplane in a process that elevated the technological symbol to a religious icon. *Divinizzazione dello spazio* (Figure 81 - Deification of Space, 1931) by Pippo Oriani presents a celebration and meditation on the universe where the mutilated shape of a cross appears along with planets and patterns of geometrical forms. In a sense, the imitation of architectural elements in painting could be connected to the idea of unity between decoration and structure. However, it can be pointed out that this actually contradicts their theory about the real use of different material and not just the reproduction or the illusion of an effect. A closer look at some of the religious works actually reveals the presence of other materials beside oil paint such as steel and ceramic as, for example, in *Resurrezione* (Figure 82 - Resurrection, 1933) by Alessandro Bruschetti.

⁹² Poggi, p. 259.

Architecture in Italy in the 1930s is characterised by a mixture of different styles and movements fighting for the regime's approval. The novelty was the development of a Rationalist movement that had the support of Futurists who considered it to be a valid contribution to the renovation of traditional architecture that they perceived as essential. But they did not accept it without a critical attitude. According to the Futurists, functionalist architecture was too monotonous and plain because it was lacking in decoration and they wanted to enrich the existing Rationalist style so that it could acquire a more Futurist identity. Their interest in architecture did not imply a rejection of decorative arts all together. Although it was positively functional it did not show any spirituality or lyricism, thus it was not appropriate to represent the modern age. It can also be said that since the majority of artists involved in architectural design were often painters as well, they had in some way to justify work and advocate the importance of. Architecture, painting and aviation collaborated and influenced Futurist art production. From a *visual* point of view the aeroplane was the means to perceive architecture from above and the scenographical characteristic of architecture appeared in painting. This was also the starting point for the development of some rather utopian theories about new forms of aerial architecture. From a *physical* point of view, architectural characteristics started were implemented in decoration and painting. *Plastica murale* constituted the tangible manifestation of the exchange in style and features between painting and architecture. Moreover, moving away from traditional media of painting, such as oil on canvas, was also an occasion for speculations about art beyond painting towards a universe of substance and cosmic dimensions. The artists' interest in experimenting with different materials and themes in their artistic practice, the overwhelming feeling produced by flight, together with the sublime monumentality in architecture, contributed to the development of a form of mysticism and interest in the supernatural. A manifestation of these feelings and the association of architecture, aviation and painting is what can be called

'profane sacred art'. To some extent, the same works within the neglected religious Futurist production seem to summarize some of the principles embedded in late Futurist production: the idea of synthesis, nature, interest in architecture, yearning for a higher and universal space, suggestion of an all encompassing space. Both in paintings and architecture the artists borrowed from primitive art, pre-war Futurism, contemporary architectural styles, technology, means of industrial production and religious symbols to create something that was original and representative of their own identity.

The merit of our architecture, and in particular the religious architecture, is the amalgamation of primitive elements with reinforced concrete, glass and steel. We raised them to the light to create fervent and spontaneous work [to represent] the climate of today and tomorrow.⁹³

⁹³ Gino Barbero, "Valori estetici dell'architettura religiosa", *La Città Nuova*, n. 3, 1934, p. 3. "Il merito della nostra architettura, specialmente religiosa, è quello di essere partiti da elementi primitivi, d'averli amalgamati nel cemento armato, nel vetro e nell'alluminio, d'averli innalzati alla Luce-Vita per farne delle opere sentite e spontanee.[...]; appunto per questo è il vero stato d'animo d'oggi e di domani".

Chapter 4 Contemporary Developments

The notion of legacy in Futurist art is probably the theme that has been most explored as a part of the celebrations of the centenary of Marinetti's 1909 manifesto. Despite the fact that Futurism did not start as an artistic movement, the attention paid to Futurist art was remarkable. The majority of these events tended to concentrate on the first two decades of the twentieth century and, in particular, the period between 1909, the date of the publication of the manifesto, and 1916, the death of Umberto Boccioni, which has traditionally been taken by critics as the end of Futurist art. For example, the very recent exhibition *Futurism in Paris* at the Pompidou Centre cites the end of the Futurist experience in Paris in 1916, effectively obliterating 1930s Italian Futurism from the record despite the fact that the presence of the Futurists in Paris up to 1934 is well documented. Overall, these events seem to perpetuate the traditional interpretation of the movement. They are very successful marketing operations that do not add any further ideas to the wider discourse on Futurism. As mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis a high number of exhibitions have been organised, some historically accurate and some less so, but unfortunately there is still very little interest in the interwar development of the Futurist movement. This situation frustrates any attempt to conduct an exhaustive analysis of contemporary concerns and questions around Futurism.

In 2007, two years before the centenary of Futurism, Luca Buvoli, an Italian born artist working in America, displayed his work *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow (Un Bellissimo Dopodomani)* at the Venice Biennale, curated by Robert Storr, entitled *Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind*. The artist created a multimedia project in which he proposed his own reading and interpretation of the Futurist movement. This installation was previously

presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia between January and March 2007 and is a comprehensive work that is part of a long term project called *Meta-Futurism*, begun in 2003. It is a flexible and versatile project composed of several works that, throughout the years, Buvoli has presented in different contexts and at various exhibitions, and in which the artist has on each occasion underlined different aspects of his revisiting of Futurist poetics. Videos, installations, sculptures, paintings and murals have all been part of the project *Meta-Futurism* at different stages, both in the small exhibitions or simultaneously in the bigger installation as at the Biennale. Buvoli's engagement with Futurism can be read as a new form of exploration and interpretation of the movement. His artistic re-elaboration creates a new chapter in the historiography of Futurism, and this alternative to the more traditional types of analysis provides a compelling opportunity. An analysis of a contemporary artist's work as both an expression and a part of the historiography of Futurism may seem an unorthodox task. However, this could add a new and deeper look to the less imaginative forms of interpretation that have characterised the studies of this period.

The structure of Buvoli's project at the Biennale, the visual correspondences, the textual references and the historical sources, seem to indicate that the artist was revisiting some of 1930s Futurist concepts rather than the movement as a whole. The originality of Buvoli's approach to Futurism lies in his quotation of the Futurist aesthetic combined with his concern to invest this aesthetic with alternative meanings that provide new interpretations. This also constitutes an occasion for further analysis of the key element of the Futurist ideology. In the first chapters, this thesis attempts to describe the controversies around the reception of *Aeropittura*. In this last chapter the analysis will be concluded by discussing the work of an artist who is embedded in contemporary artistic discourse but at the same time revisits a modernist movement. Through his retrospective journey the artist attempts to cast a modern perspective on a past movement. Underlining which aspects of the Futurist aesthetic have

been perpetuated and which deconstructed can provide a more comprehensive outlook of how artists have received the Futurist movement over time.

Throughout the history of art, several movements and artists have been identified as the successors and perpetuators of Futurist principles. Revivals and appropriations have frequently emerged in the artistic panorama. The alleged influence that Futurism had on later Italian art has pertained to different elements of the Futurist movement including themes, aesthetics and terminology. For example, the last room of the exhibition *Futurismo 1909-2009*, curated by Giovanni Lista and Ada Masoero and held in Milan in 2009, was entitled *L'eredità del Futurismo* where works by post-war Italian artists such as Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri, Piero Dorazio and Mario Schifano were exhibited.¹ Although the importance of this strategy must be recognised, summarising the legacy of Futurism in one room was, inevitably, a challenge. The varied and occasionally contradictory nature of the movement can be an obstacle in the process of tracing the legacy of Futurism. However, art historians now agree that fragmenting Futurism into separate moments can be misleading. An exhibition held in Italy entitled *Il futuro del Futurismo* explored the possible different influences that Futurism had on later art including recent works by Damien Hirst, Vito Acconci, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Gilbert & George.² In this case, the range of works and artists that the exhibition included as part of a discourse on the legacy of Futurism is extraordinarily wide, raising questions about how, and according to which criteria, it is possible to identify a possible Futurist legacy.

In her study of the reappraisal of the Baroque by contemporary artists, Mieke Bal suggests that an artistic engagement with an earlier period can expose contemporary concerns and

¹ Giovanni Lista and Ada Masoero, *Futurismo 1909-2009: velocità+arte+azione*. exh. cat. Milan, 2009.

² Giacinto di Pietrantonio and Maria Cristina Rodeschini, *Il futuro del Futurismo*. exh. cat. Milan, 2007.

concurrently provide a more informed interpretation of the past artistic production.³ An investigation of the reassessments of Futurism in more recent artistic contexts might reveal contemporary anxieties in reference to Futurist aesthetics and ideology, and at the same time infuse new impetus into the interpretation of Futurist art, too often paralyzed in a sterile scholarly orthodoxy. Bal states:

By endorsing the present as a historical moment in the act of interpretation itself, one can make much more of the object under scrutiny. One can learn from it, enable it to speak and to speak back, as a full interlocutor in debates about knowledge, meaning, aesthetics and what matters about these in today's world.⁴

Exploring contemporary artistic attitudes towards Futurism might constructively contribute towards identifying stereotypes, misconceptions and prejudices in conventional interpretations. Benjamin Buchloh, in his study on artistic appropriation, provides an interesting perspective:

The aesthetic practice and appropriation may result from an authentic desire to question the historical validity of a local, contemporary code by linking it to a different set of codes, such as previous styles, heterogeneous iconic sources, or to different modes of production and reception.⁵

In the 1950s, the artist Lucio Fontana and *Spazialismo* movement were considered as the heirs of the theory of space that was shaped by Futurism. Thus, Enrico Crispolti produced a catalogue raisonné in which he tried to map Fontana's work in relation to contemporary European artistic production, much as he had done previously for late Futurism. Fontana was active in the interwar period, working in Milan in 1927 and he was in contact with the

³ Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁴ Bal, p. 18.

⁵ Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), p. 348.

Rationalist group. In 1931 he was in contact with the group *Abstraction-Création* of which Prampolini was a member. The recent Futurist exhibition in Milan ends by showing the famous *Concetto spaziale* (Figure 84 - Spatial Concept, 1951) in which the artist breaks the ultimate spatial barrier by cutting the canvas. In 1951 Fontana stated: "The real conquest of space made by man is to take off from the ground, from the skyline, which for millennia was the basis of his aesthetic and proportion. Thus the fourth dimension comes into being, volume is now truly contained in space in all its dimension".⁶ *Concetto Spaziale* deploys a title typical of Aeropittura and in a sense, after the war, Fontana adopted the main themes of Aeropittura translating them into a more conceptual language. The cuts and holes that Fontana produced on the canvas seem to actualise the idea of going beyond painting proposed by Aeropittura in the representation of a physical space and the *polimaterismo*, mainly supported by Prampolini. The article *Il superamento della pittura* argued that the extensive and flat surface of the canvas conveyed the idea of superficiality that art needed to address.⁷ Fontana proposed a physical reaction to the need to overcome the canvas and go beyond painting. According to Sarah Whitfield, Fontana presented the "vastness of the universe in the microcosm of the hole, the mysteries of geographical time are balanced by the still greater mysteries of outer space".⁸ Crispolti draws attention to Fontana's ideas on space, expressed in a late interview he gave: "beyond perspective, the discovery of the cosmos is a new dimension, it is the infinite; I made holes in this canvas that was at the base of all art and I created an infinite dimension, the idea is exactly that, it is a new dimension that corresponds to the cosmos".⁹ In a sense Fontana reconciles between the two extremes of the notion of

⁶ Sarah Whitfield, *Lucio Fontana*. exh. cat. London (Hayward Gallery) 1999, p. 187.

⁷ [A.] Silvi Antonini, "Il superamento della pittura", *Artecrazia*, 5, n. 88, 21-27 December 1936, p. 1.

⁸ Whitfield, p. 14.

⁹ Lucio Fontana in Enrico Crispolti, *Fontana: catalogo generale* (Milan: Electa, 1986), p. 19. "Più in là della prospettiva la scoperta del cosmo è una dimensione nuova, è l'infinito, allora buco questa tela che era alla base di tutte le arti e ho creato una dimensione infinita, l'idea è proprio quella lì, è una dimensione nuova corrispondente al cosmo".

space proposed by Aeropittura: mental and physical spatial dimensions. Despite the strong interest in Fontana's conceptual representation of space, materiality constitutes another consistent and vital theme of his art. In sculptural works, such as the sphere series entitled *Natura* (Figure 83 - Nature, from 1959) or *Donna con fiore* (Figure 85 - Woman with Flower, 1948), he expresses his interest in matter, and the artist describes the series *Buchi* and *Tagli* (Figure 86, Figure 87 - Holes and Cuts, from 1949) and *Pietre* (Stones, 1952-1956) as sculptural links with the canvas. The materiality of the canvas, and the creation a more sensorial connection with the work was something that the Futurists tried to achieve with *plastica murale*. However, the concepts of outer space and cosmos are the main themes that inform Fontana's earlier works. The artist himself acknowledges the legacy of Futurism in his own work: "[the Futurists have inspired me: time and space]. They already started to experiment with the limits of figuration and they began considering art as a mysterious and philosophical happening, resulting from a new consciousness not necessarily figurative".¹⁰ Fontana repeatedly recognised the influence of Boccioni in his own sculptural works and his use of colours.¹¹

Also in paintings, Boccioni's legacy is clearly recognisable. Although Fontana mentioned Boccioni as a source of inspiration, he did not identify what particular branch of the Futurist movement that had a strong impact on his work, and the artist seems fascinated by some of the themes that were at the root of Aeropittura. Many critics have underlined how the sky has been an inspiration for Fontana and *Attese* (Figure 88 - Waiting, 1958) seems to be a re-visitation of Boccioni's *Stati d'animo* (Figure 89 - States of Mind) produced in 1911. The surreal atmosphere that permeated Fontana's work finds a counterpart in the suspended

¹⁰ Tommaso Trini, *Ultima intervista a Lucio Fontana* (1968) published in Bruno Corà ed. *Burri e Fontana: 1949-1968*. exh. cat. Prato, 1996, p. 67 "[Mi hanno imboccato i Futuristi: tempo e spazio]. I Futuristi incominciavano già a sondare i limiti della figurazione e danno il via all'arte come fatto misterioso, filosofico, di coscienza nuova, non di coscienza figurative".

¹¹ Whitfield, p. 22.

moment typically represented by Boccioni. The immense blue is overwhelming, only occasionally alternated with holes that, instead of afflicting the canvas, open up an even more immense dimension of space. In this work, that was said to be a reference to the Argentine sky of which his stepbrother took photographs of thousands stars, Fontana introduces a spatial dimension to a work that is clearly referring to the dimension of time as stated in the title. The landscape produced by Fontana becomes a conceptual space informed by the idea of infinite space and cosmic dimension: a space of observation and memory. The artist observes the sky from the earth in this work, however he also fantasises on a representation of spheres and circles where the viewer is located in an elevated position of visual privilege. The means of flight was for Fontana a source of inspiration.

An expression of aerial art that lasts a minute, yet appears to last for a millennium into eternity. Today we spatialist artists have escaped from our tower, we have broken out of our corporeal bodies, our chrysalis, and we have looked down upon ourselves from above, photographing the earth from a rocket in full flight.¹²

Fontana's feelings about the possibility of an aerial art were similar to those expressed towards Futurist art in the *Aeropittura* manifesto and the architectural theories of the 1930s including those of Le Corbusier:

The tower of Babel is a very ancient example of the pretension of the man to dominate space. The real conquest achieved by man is the detachment from earth, from the horizon line that for millennia was at the base of the aesthetic and proportion. The fourth dimension was then born, volume is now really contained in space in all its dimensions. The first spatial form built by man is the airship. With the domination of space, man built the first architecture of the spatial era: the aeroplane. The artistic fantasies will be directed to these spatial architectures in movement.¹³

¹² Whitfield, p. 96.

¹³ Lucio Fontana, *Manifesto Tecnico dello Spazialismo* published in Crispolti, p. 37. "La Torre di Babele è un esempio antichissimo della pretesa dell'uomo per il dominio dello spazio. La vera conquista dello spazio fatta dall'uomo è il distacco dalla terra, dalla linea d'orizzonte, che per millenni fu la base della sua estetica e proporzione. Nasce così la quarta dimensione, il volume è ora veramente contenuto nello spazio in tutte le sue

These words seem to be very similar to some Aeropittura statements in reference to 'going beyond' and 'breaking' with perspective. Fontana's interest in flight shows also his curiosity in reference to scientific research and discoveries:

In the late 1940s his visions of a new spatial era driven by the gathering momentum of scientific knowledge had an innocence about it, the innocence of adventure and optimism, but as space exploration became reality so did the harshness of that reality. The immense risk facing the astronauts, the discomfort they were forced to endure and the mental toll of their confinement and solitude became subjects of enormous public interest.¹⁴

In a sense Fontana's artistic inspiration developed and was informed by issues in relation to contemporary technological developments. Similarly, the long trajectory of Futurism resulted in an artistic experience that, despite being coherent with some basic and fundamental principles, developed and was adapted according to social, cultural and scientific developments. According to Fontana the new scientific discovery was bound to have an effect on the way in which people think and live. In the *Manifesto Tecnico dello Spazialismo* he states:

The new physical forces, the domination of the earth and space gradually impose on man conditions that were never experienced in his previous history. The application of all these scientific discoveries, in every form of life creates a substantial transformation of the human thought.¹⁵

dimensioni. La prima forma spaziale contruita dall'uomo è l'aerostato. Col dominio dello spazio, l'uomo cotruisce la prima architettura dell'era spaziale: l'aeroplano. A queste architetture spaziali in movimento si trsmetteranno le nuove fantasie dell'arte.....".

¹⁴ Whitfield, p. 44.

¹⁵ Lucio Fontana, *Manifesto Tecnico dello Spazialismo*. "Le scoperte di nuove forze fisiche, il dominio della materia e dello spazio impogono gradualmente all'uomo condizioni che non sono mai esistite nella sua precedente storia. L'applicazione di queste scoperte in tutte le forme della vita crea una trasformazione sostanziale del pensiero".

The same feeling was experienced by the Aeropainters when they declared that the sensibility of the human being had been modified by the aeroplanes and experience of flight and consequently art had to adapt to this new dimension. Consistent with the entire Futurist ideology, Fontana was particularly interested in the idea of synthesis and the deployment of particular forms to convey the idea of movement and unity in art.

Several millennia have passed since the origin of the artistic analytic development, now it is the moment of synthesis. Before, separation was necessary but today it represents a disintegration of the conceived unity. We conceived synthesis as a sum of different physical elements: colour, noise, movement and space that integrate ideal unity and matter.¹⁶

If Fontana agreed with the Futurists in identifying the movement as a principle of understanding space, there was still the need to find the forms through which this movement could be expressed. As mentioned in the second chapter, if the spiral is inherent in Boccioni's work, the late Futurists deployed the circle and sphere. After the war, Fontana created a variant to the spiral with the vortex as the best form to convey his ideas on space. In *Ambiente spaziale* (Figure 90 - Spatial Ambience, 1961), the vortex is presented as a key form in the neon installation created for the Milan Triennial in 1961. Unlike the spiral, the vortex represents an even more intuitive impression of space characterised by an irregular form and unpredictable behaviour. Although, this chapter does not intend to provide an exhaustive examination of Fontana's work, it becomes clear that the continuity in terms of spatial theories is not only a prerogative of the early and late Futurism but also informs Italian post-war artistic production. Moreover, the tendency to bypass 1930s Futurism and

¹⁶ Fontana, Ibid., "Passati vari millenni del suo sviluppo artistico analitico, arriva il momento della sintesi. Prima la separazione fu necessaria, oggi costituisce una disintegrazione dell'unità concepita. Concepiamo la sintesi con una somma di elementi fisici: colore suono, movimento, spazio, integranti unità ideale e materiale".

Aeropittura in a discourse on the Futurist legacy (except for some occasional mentions of Prampolini's *polimaterismo*) seems to be groundless.

While Fontana was exploring the cosmos and the idea of boundless space, the members of Nuclear Art in the 1950s, which also drew inspiration from the Futurist conception of space, were concentrating more on the examination of the very small units of matter. The term *Nucleare* was first deployed, in an artistic context, in the 1950 *Manifesto della Pittura e Plastica Nucleare* by Depero, himself actively involved in Futurism and Aeropittura.¹⁷ The nuclear artist Enrico Baj explores different spatial themes in his art and produced the *Pittura e Arte Interplanetaria* that, similar to Boccioni, deployed the spiral as a recurrent symbolic form. In Baj's work the spiral is a clear reference to the structure of the atom and DNA. What was only mentioned by Aeropittura in reference to the possibility of an interplanetary dimension in art, was then fully theorized later with Nuclear art: "by now the creative need to celebrate the new interplanetary conquests, which is an eternal myth connected to the flight of Icarus, to the tarred linen wings of the Wright brothers and the mysterious turmoil of the cosmic radiations".¹⁸ Further similarity between the Futurists, Fontana and the Nuclear movement were the interest in science and the deployment of the manifesto format as a tool of communication. However, Baj underlines the fact that, unlike Fontana, they were mainly interested in the contradictions of science:

Many of my paintings set off from this starting point: they are forms of birth and death, images of disintegrating matter, in which it is nevertheless possible to find a sign of rebirth. On the contrary, Fontana was a positivist; he had an evolutionist concept of science

¹⁷ Fortunato Depero, "Manifesto della Pittura e Plastica Nucleare", *Il Nuovo Caffè*, II, n. 6, November-December, 1950.

¹⁸ Enrico Baj, "Manifesto dell'Arte Interplanetaria [1959] published in Tristan Sauvage [Arturo Schwarz], *Arte Nucleare* (Milan: Schwarz, 1962), p. 211. "Ormai si rafforza la necessità creativa di celebrare le nuove conquiste interplanetarie, eterno mito che si ricollega al volo di Icaro, alle ali di lino incatramato dei fratelli Wright e alla misteriosa ridda delle radiazioni cosmiche".

that he intended as a technological progress in uninterrupted becoming.¹⁹

The recurrent reference to the Futurist legacy is not limited to the above cases. For example, due to his interest in nature and the application of matter in art, Alberto Burri and his *Sacchi* (Figure 91 - Sacks) series created in the 1960s draw a parallel with Prampolini's *polimaterismo* developed in the 1930s. Moreover, the utopian nature of Italian architecture between the 1960s and 1970s has also been associated with the Futurist theories in Sant'Elia's architecture. Crispolti in *Ricostruzione Futurista dell'universo* traces a series of possible Futurist aesthetic sources in different architectural production and theory across geographical areas with particular attention being paid to the concept of utopia, metropolitan visionary architecture, and mega-structures in the 1960s. In the same period, the Italian pop artist Mario Schifano concentrated his work on revisiting some of the Futurist visual material. Schifano's work was exhibited at the Futurist exhibition in Milan in the section on the Futurist legacy. In the series entitled *Futurismo rivistato* (Figure 92 - Futurism Revisited, 1966) Schifano elaborated in painting, and using different techniques, a photograph of five Futurists taken in 1912. In a moment in which scholarly criticism was rediscovering Futurism, Schifano engaged with a highly symbolical Futurist image. The photograph was taken in Paris very close to a gallery that was showing a Futurist exhibition. The photograph depicts the main figures of Futurism at the time: Luigi Russolo, Carlo Carrà, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni and Gino Severini. It could be considered the visual equivalent of the Futurist manifesto; it is a declaration of intent in a visual statement and Schifano celebrates the claim of modernity inherent in the photograph. Schifano, as a pop

¹⁹ Fabrizia Lanza Pietromarchi, "Intervista con Enrico Baj" in Fabrizia Lanza Pietromarchi, *La pittura spaziale e nucleare a Milano* (Venezia: Amedeo Porro, 1996), p. 26. "Molti miei dipinti partono da questo spunto: sono forme di nascita e di morte, immagini di materia che si disintegra, nella quale è possibile trovare però un segno di rinascita. Fontana invece era un positivista, aveva un concetto evoluzionistico della scienza che intendeva come progresso tecnologico in continuo divenire".

artist, is successful in identifying an icon of Futurism, a symbol of modernity and engages with it. Lista states:

The series recognises the official value of the Futurist as avant-garde. Schifano does not refer to a work or a formal technique. He quotes an attitude, a social behaviour, the avant-garde choice of solidarity within a group that turned art into life. He is celebrating the historical episode that legitimated Italian modern art internationally.²⁰

There have also been situations in which groups of artists have attempted to recreate the Futurist movement itself with the same characteristics. An exemplary case is *Futurismo-Oggi* that developed in 1970s, founded by Enzo Benedetto and including artists such as Tullio Crali. This movement attempted to revive Futurist ideas in a contemporary context. Benedetto explains dispassionately the fact that Futurism was always neglected:

The lack of interest in the ideas to which we dedicated all our life compelled me to take an initiative to produce a collective declaration for the surviving Futurists. As a result I wrote a first draft and I sent it to a group of friends with whom I had regular relationship: Acquaviva, Crali, Dottori, Marasco, Pettoruti, and Sartori. As soon as I had their approval I communicated the final text to the others and I published a first brochure with the signatures of the people who approved it. So the *Dichiarazione di Futurismo-Oggi* was born (it was not called manifesto because manifestos were characteristics of Marinetti and I did not want to overrate our initiative).²¹

However, rather than proposing any innovative aesthetic solutions, this group of artists were in a sense looking to Futurism retrospectively. One of the main principles proposed by

²⁰ Lista, p. 281. "La serie ha il valore di una rivendicazione ufficiale che si riconosce nell'avanguardia futurista. Schifano non si riferisce più a un'opera o a un procedimento formale. Cita un atteggiamento, un comportamento microsociologico, cioè la scelta avanguardistica della solidarietà di un gruppo che fa dell'arte un impegno di vita. Celebra per questo l'episodio storico che ha istituito in ambito internazionale la legittimità di un'arte moderna italiana".

²¹ Enzo Benedetto, *Futurismo centotrenta* (Rome: Arte-viva, 1975), pp. 205-206. "Comunque il disinteresse per le idee alle quali avevamo dedicato tutta la nostra vita mi spinse a prendere l'iniziativa di una dichiarazione collettiva dei Futuristi sopravvissuti. Così redassi una bozza che inviai ad un gruppo di amici con i quali avevo rapporti continui: Acquaviva, Crali, Dottori Marasco, Pettoruti, Sartoris. Appena ebbi la loro approvazione comunicai il testo definitivo agli altri e pubblicai un primo opuscolo con le firme di chi lo aveva approvato. Così nacque la Dichiarazione di Futurismo Oggi (che non fu chiamata manifesto perchè questi furono proprio caratteristici dell'epoca di Marinetti e non volevo sopravvalutare la nostra iniziativa).

Benedetto was the fact that Futurism was a unitary movement and not an agglomeration of contradictory ideas. Futurism was not a movement but an idea that was in an ongoing process of development.²² However, whilst Benedetto was claiming that Futurism, as a dynamic movement, was always under development, he was looking back to the past glories of Futurism. His publication was mainly a tool for remembrance and archival research. Some of the articles were in fact concentrating on researching and discussing particular documents of Futurism. For example, Benedetto presented his discovery in reference to the date and the origin of the famous accident that happened to Marinetti in 1908. Interestingly, this movement always struggled to find a sense of internal cohesion, particularly due to the different policies that its members wanted to pursue. Tullio Crali left the movement after an argument with its members due to the exclusion of some artists from the Aeropittura exhibition in 1972 in which, according to Crali, only the 'original' aeropainters had the right to participate. Generally speaking, the publication *Futurismo-Oggi* conveys the idea of a very self-referential publication that survived thanks to the collaboration and support of a very narrow group of people who were somehow indulging in their isolation, often positively surprised to witness a renewed interest in Futurism, but at the same time very critical of the sort of interpretative efforts being carried out in relation to Futurism. Benedetto, in his response to an article on the role of Futurism in the politics of 1930s published in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* discusses how it is crucial to separate the Futurist *idea* that was born in 1909 and the Futurist *movement* created to promote participation. According to Benedetto, the political choices and actions of the Futurists could not be examined with contemporary criteria and the political discourse needs to be detached from the creative conception of art. He concludes by saying that although the Futurist movement failed, or was

²² Benedetto, p. 155.

proven to be wrong, in its political convictions, on the other hand Futurism cannot and did not fail because it was mainly an idea, a natural force of life and intelligence.²³

Later in the 1980s the movement *Nuovo Futurismo* appeared on the artistic scene and several exhibitions curated by Renato Barilli were organised in Italy. In the last chapter of *Numeri innamorati* Guido Bartorelli mentions the strong relationships between the group of artists active in *Nuovo Futurismo* in the 1980s and their appropriation of some of the aesthetics of the second Futurism in the 1930s:

The formal similarity with the [futurist] movement of the 1920s and 1930s is striking; the only difference is that now the aesthetic structures are not enclosed within the frame and they now expand to invade the space. But ultimately even this idea was inherent in the second Futurism and in its need to propose itself in tangible and concrete ways as demonstrated in the concept of the reconstruction of the universe.²⁴

At the base of these revivals, lies the intention of either extrapolating some convenient elements from the Futurist aesthetic or ideology that could then be deployed in new artistic contexts or, in other cases, the attempt to recreate the artistic experience itself. Because of its fragmented and eclectic nature Futurism has been associated with all sorts of artistic expressions and movements. The Futurists themselves borrowed from other artistic expressions. In his study, Crispolti examines the 1930s European artistic panorama and underlines the similarities between Futurism and European art in the same period. Amongst all of these artistic revivals and Futurist influences it is rare to find an operation that also

²³ Enzo Benedetto, "Equivoci", *Futurismo-oggi. Periodico mensile per i giovani Futuristi italiani*, XXI, 3-4, March-April 1989, pp. 10-13.

²⁴ Guido Bartorelli, *Numeri innamorati: sintesi e dinamiche del secondo Futurismo* (Turin: Testo&Immagine, 2001), p. 164. "La vicinanza formale con il movimento degli anni Venti e Trenta è sorprendente, con la differenza che ora le strutture non ne vogliono più sapere di starsene racchiuse entro la cornice e vanno ad invadere lo spazio. Ma in fondo pure ciò era insito nel secondo Futurismo, nel suo bisogno di proporsi nei modi tangibili e concreti della ricostruzione dell'universo".

provides a critical analysis of the movement's theories. The two approaches seem to belong to two different worlds: the world of art practice and the world of art criticism and history.

For this reason Buvoli represents an original case study. He deploys the codes and aesthetic of Futurism with the intent of conducting a critical analysis of the movement rather than merely celebrating and re-proposing the Futurist aesthetic. It is neither a perpetuation nor an appropriation but it could be more correctly defined as an actualisation and re-contextualisation of Futurism. The work attempts an analysis that includes not only the Futurist aesthetic but also the Futurist theme, codes and canons of Futurist poetics. By acknowledging the controversial political association, the artist ponders issues of control, communication and the fine line that separates art and propaganda. However, his work should also to be examined in relation to contemporary art practice. Buvoli is very much a contemporary artist embedded in contemporary artistic discourse and theories. His project is also an occasion to reflect on the parallels between past and present in our society. When questioned about what sort of Futurism he was trying to re-read, Buvoli answered that he approached Futurism backwards.²⁵ He started from the idea of the hero, the fascination with flight typically associated with 1930s Futurism, to the memory of his family and particular his father who was a pilot in the Second World War and who spent time in a deportation camp. It is a journey that starts in our time pondering on issues of power, control and communication both in American and Italian societies and politics. The artist combines all of these ingredients with the memory of his family and attempts to extend this personal memory to a collective memory and translate a verbal and narrative transcription into a visual correspondence.

In his engagement with Futurism, the artist seems to overcome the traditional chronological borders assigned to the movement. He deals with the figurative language of *Aeropittura* but at

²⁵ Luca Buvoli, Interview with Elisa Sai, London, January 2009.

the same time he confronts and deconstructs Marinetti's manifesto. Buvoli himself admits to the influences and the interest that the 1930s had in his cultural formation and how the Futurist production of that period constitutes a key visual source for him. Despite this fact, it is clearly nonsensical to confine Buvoli's artistic sources exclusively to that period and the framework of his work can be identified in the general contemporary artistic trend of re-reading and drawing inspiration from Modernism. However the fact that the artist is also interested in the period between the 1920s and the 1930s is unusual. As was mentioned above, the tendency has always been to bypass the 1930s in order to draw a line that could directly connect the first decade of the twentieth century to post-war Italian art. Buvoli introduces an inverting trend by openly stating his interest in the interwar period: its Futurist aesthetic and visual references, the analysis of communication and themes. The visual reference also includes the language of display and communication that Buvoli studied in catalogues, such as those for the 1932 *Mostra della rivoluzione Fascista*, 1934 *Esposizione aeronautica* and 1934 *Mostra dello sport*. His aim was not only to familiarise himself with Futurist aesthetics, but also with the ambiguous concepts of art and propaganda and to immerse himself in the ambiguity of that cultural period. This is not only intriguing in terms of a visual correspondence to 1930s Futurism but also in terms of the artist's perception and reading of codes, the language of display and visual communication. Moreover, in contrast with previous revivals of Futurism Buvoli does not ignore the controversial political association that has never appeared in any artistic re-elaboration of the Futurist art. Conversely, in literary studies on Futurism the political context has constituted the main subject of analysis.

An Artistic Journey Back to Futurism

Buvoli is an Italian born artist; he has lived and worked in America for the last 20 years since he left the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice where he held a position as an assistant professor. Buvoli's *Meta-Futurism* project started six years ago and over time has included different media and works including posters, videos, animation and sculpture. However, some of the themes and ideas for this project appeared in early works by Buvoli. He incorporates these elements into *Meta-Futurism* and invests them with a new perspective in his re-reading of the Futurist movement.

In 1992 Buvoli started the series entitled *Not-a-Superhero* (Figure 93) in which the artist introduces, elaborates and deconstructs the notion of the hero and heroism by deploying the language of comics. Describing his artistic development Buvoli underlines the importance of the comic tradition in a particular moment of his career. This is not only connected to a childhood passion but represented an escape from the traditional artistic training he undertook when he was a student in Venice. His decision to move to New York was a kind of liberation for his creativity. He wanted to react to the rigid and geometrised line of the anatomical drawing he was teaching: the frame and the traditional approach to art. He was looking for a flexible line that could tell its own story, not constricted in any preformed or structured frame. It represented Buvoli's departure, both artistically and psychologically from what he defines as the limiting structuralist vision of body and frames. In describing the process of emancipation of the line and his liberating experience he uses the term 'de-skilling'.²⁶ This word has a particular significance in the terminology of art criticism. The origin of this term goes back to Karl Marx and the escalating unskilled labour force in factories, the decline of

²⁶ Luca Buvoli, Interview with Elisa Sai, London, January 2009.

craft skill and its replacement with technological means. As Judith Rodenbeck explains, the term has been widely employed in different contexts, for example “in 1981 the Conceptual artist Ian Burn used the word deskilling to describe the way in which avant-garde artists of the early 1960s divested themselves of the obligations of physical production and invested more in conception and presentation”.²⁷ It has been used to discuss artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol and has often negatively suggested the decreasing of the artist’s physical intervention in the process of creation. A recent publication by John Roberts entitled *The Intangibilities of Form. Skill and Deskilling after the Readymade* attempts to readdress the dialectic between de-skilling and re-skilling, looking positively at the possibility offered by the continuous exchange between these two processes in contemporary art.²⁸ Roberts also underlines the contemporary tendency in which the boundaries between artistic practice and museum curation seem to blur. A new generation of artists/curators seems to emerge and the act of curation seems to acquire a status similar to that of the artwork itself. Whatever debate this could generate in terms of legitimacy in reference to this process, it seems to me that this very operation of including Buvoli’s art in the historiography of Futurism could be part of this shift.

While *Not-a-Superhero* substantiates Buvoli’s deskilling, he identifies *Meta-Futurism* as the starting point in his own process of re-skilling: “I had to return to the drawing I was doing twenty years earlier, studying, copying, and thinking about the rigid fields of opposition. I had to discipline myself and face syntaxes, in this case the Futurist syntax that I had forgotten”.²⁹ The study of Futurist syntaxes, the combinations of colours, formal solutions, codes, terminology, fonts, the reintroduction of a frame and structure which is physically

²⁷ Judith Rodenbeck, ‘Hands Off’, *Modern Painters*, October 2007, pp. 84-91.

²⁸ John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (New York: Verso, 2007).

²⁹ Luca Buvoli, Interview with Elisa Sai, London, January 2009.

imposed on the posters and intentionally realised by the artist in the videos are all part of Buvoli's auto discipline and re-skilling. He went back to his academic training of twenty years earlier, but also to the original historical and cultural framework in which the Futurist works were produced. He looked back to the past, something that Marinetti would not have done in 1909 when the manifesto was first published, but a process that the Futurists in the 1930s happily embraced with their admiration for the so-called primitives. Whilst the rejection of the past was the keystone of Marinetti's politics of rupture, this was completely extraneous to later Futurism when the artists showed respect not only for their own past which was constituted by Sant'Elia and Boccioni, but also for art from previous centuries that had long been considered the very essence of traditional Italian art.

The process of deskilling that the artist claims to have undertaken is manifest in *Not-a-Superhero* and in particular in the delineation of the main character of this narrative. *Not-a-Superhero* is a comic-book figure, an action figure, a hero who has lost his power and invulnerability. The work is in essence fragile and elusive like the action figures that represent the several characters of this fragmented narrative. The anti-hero is never fully formed and is in continuous motion. The movement is his attempt to survive the perverse Dr. Logos, who is emblematic of the power of rationality and Cartesian logic and the hero's resistance to becoming a fully formed being. Barry Schwabsky in "The Accidental Superhero" states: "Yet in contrast to the Futurists' manically optimistic understanding of the idea of movement, Buvoli's work is saturated with the sense of movement as a problem, a symptom of imperfection. Being perfect and therefore static, while becoming – and movement – reflects a fundamental lack".³⁰ If the movement epitomized the perfect status quo for the Futurist, in Buvoli's work motion is represented both as the only power left to the super-hero and as a chronic and inescapable condition. Through his unconventional approach

³⁰ Barry Schwabsky, "The Accidental Superhero", *World Art*, 20, 1999, pp. 24-27.

to the comic tradition and using hand-drawn animation, Buvoli creates his ironical and compelling stories “mimicking the mass-produced format and scope of Marvel and DC and replacing it with my scratchy collages and sculptures made of urban debris”.³¹ The anti-hero created by Buvoli represents the anti-rhetorical version of a superhero, he does not possess the physicality of the traditional superhero. He is insubstantial and frail. The video that accompanies the comic books show a character who in his fragility and colourlessness is swallowed by the gigantic black holes that constantly rage in his fictional world. The artistic objects that result from Buvoli’s anti-hero are fragmented, interrupted and uncertain. The message is not univocal and deviations are common practice. Buvoli presents his anti-hero in line with a new general period of decadence and deterioration in the symbolism of the hero. The publication *Heroes in the Global World* explains how the idea of the anti-hero and the downfall of the superhero started in the last century due to the advent of new technologies.

Comic book superheroes were painted in grand bold strokes, articulated muscles stretched out and held in by luminous uniforms which accentuated sleekness, power and cut down on wind resistance as they glided from deed to deed. These were the heroes who did not sweat, whose hair was never out of place, whose omnipotence reassured fragile young minds that rescue was always just around the corner, that anything could be overcome if you believed. Superheroes could not withstand the scrutiny of the all-seeing television lens that revealed not major culpability, but minor corporeal disarrangement. Superhuman probably could withstand the devastating revelation of his double identity, but not the wrinkles that marred his uniform and suggested that perhaps behind that frayed exterior could be found a torn and tattered soul – someone closer to us.³²

Despite being now an anti-hero, flying as a superpower is still granted to the disconnected protagonist of this story. *Not-a-Superhero* does not specifically refer to Futurism, however

³¹ David Grosz, “Luca Buvoli Is Not-a-Superhero”, *Artinfo.com*, August 2007.

<http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/25496/luca-buvoli-is-not-a-superhero/?page=1>. 25/01/2010.

³² Susan J. Drucker and Gary Gumpert, *Heroes in the Global World* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2007), p. 143.

the idea of heroism in relation to flight finds a compelling juxtaposition in the interwar Futurist poetics.

The (Anti)Hero

In the Futurist universe in general and in Aeropittura specifically, the aviator was the hero, the brave man who could overcome the traditional terrestrial border and experience the newly discovered aerial dimension. The aviator was often the artist himself who had to fly and then translate the resulting aerial experience into painting. The figure of the aviator has been the subject of idealisation in many historical periods and geographical locations. The idea of the heroic human and his embodiment in the figure of the aviator finds its artistic correspondent in the figurative language of Aeropittura. Enrico Prampolini in the work *Aeroritratto simultaneo di Italo Balbo* (Figure 1 - Italo Balbo's Simultaneous Aero-Portrait, 1940) celebrates the pilot who in 1933 crossed the Atlantic by air - an event that was taken as the symbol of the success of the Italian aviation. Prampolini represents the pilot his blazing machine of which he seems in total control. The colours convey the idea of power and fiery energy. In the aerosculpture by Renato di Bosso entitled *Pilota stratosferico* (Figure 94 - Stratospheric Pilot, 1938) the artist communicates the idea of an indestructible man with an imperishable metallic body shaped by the aerial dimension. Heroism in the period was strongly associated with the cult of body. The idealised powerful and athletic body is personified in the figure of Mussolini. In the book *Supermen Supreme* Gigliola Gori observes:

The exaltation of the virile body as a metaphor for Fascism was common to all fascisms, but its manifestation in the body of the Duce himself was a peculiar Italian phenomenon. Mussolini came to symbolize virility, not only for the virile strength of his idea and

the bravery attributed with reason to him, but also for the power of his muscles and the talent which, it was recounted, allowed him to practice every kind of sport with success.³³

The fragmented body of the hero in *Not-a-Superhero* is opposed to the unitary and undivided figure of the imperishable Futurist man in which the cult of the body plays a key role. In the first development of Futurism, Marinetti himself embraces the figure of the mechanical man who will embody those characteristics that could transform his flesh into an indestructible machine: “We believe in the possibility of an incalculable number of human transformations and without irony claim that wings sleep in the flesh of man [...]. The non-human mechanical type, built for an omnipresent speed will be naturally cruel, omniscient and combative”.³⁴ Hal Foster in his essay *Prosthetic Gods* states:

And rather than resist the machine as a force of fragmentation and reification, he [Marinetti] urges that it be embraced as the very figure of totality and vitality. In this way Marinetti conceives technology not as a violation of body and nature but as a means to reconfigure both as better than new, more than whole.³⁵

Christine Poggi in *Inventing Futurism* discusses the new human type that the Futurists wanted to propose:

Rather than affirm a classically beautiful body, in harmony with nature and the stable, rational order of the universe, the Futurists sought to reconfigure the male body to resist shocks and omnipresent speed, in preparation for a nonhuman, mechanical and combative destiny. Through rebirth in the form of a man/machine complex, the Futurist male would fuse flesh with metal as a prelude to an even more sublime fusion with the volatile world of matter.³⁶

³³ Gigliola Gori, “Model of Masculinity: Mussolini, the ‘New Italian’ of the Fascist Era” in J. A. Mangan ed. *Superman Supreme: Fascist Body as Political Icon - Global Fascism* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 43.

³⁴ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine” (1911) in Christine Poggi, “Dreams of Metallized Flesh: Futurism and the Masculine Body”, *Modernism/Modernity*, 4.3, 1997, pp. 19-43.

³⁵ Hal Foster, “Prosthetic Gods”, *Modernism/Modernity*, 4.2, 1997, pp. 5-38.

³⁶ Christine Poggi, *Inventing Futurism. The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: University Press, 2008), p. 150.

The same ideas are put forward in her discussion on Buvoli's installation at the Venice Biennale in relation to the powerful and monumental sculpture that was hanging from the ceiling at the entrance of the installation. The sculpture describes a human shape with stretched arms expressing his or her intention to engage in flight. Poggi states: "Buvoli's aviator/aeroplane, which he calls Vector, refers to these dreams of transcendence, power and immortality although in a distinctly less heroic manner".³⁷ The sculpture is a human being in his flight enterprise without the machine. It could be the man who has already internalised the machine and acquired its power. Alternatively, it could be the body that has succeeded in liberating itself from its dependence on the mechanical tool and is now unconstrained. Buvoli does not state his intention clearly. In the video *Adapting One's Sense to High Altitude Flight* the continuing interchange and transformation of human being into machine and vice versa is not heading towards any definite direction. The body is constantly mutated into a machine, to then return to human form in other parts of the videos. This perpetuates the fluctuating nature of the relationship between body and machine proposed by Buvoli. Foster declares that Marinetti's embracing of the machine could be interpreted as a form of defence from threatening nature and the danger of the machine itself. However, from the perspective of the Futurist mechanical man, the dialectal relationship between man and machine has always been ambiguous. Although the initial opinion that the Futurists had of anything spiritual and introspective was very negative, the resilient mechanical man in the Aeropittura imagery acquires a distinct introspective connotation:

Sportsman, aviator or warrior he would be capable of astounding feats of physical prowess. His inner consciousness, modelled in the running motor, would be emptied of all that was private, sentimental and

³⁷ Christine Poggi, *Luca Buvoli. A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow (Un Bellissimo Dopodomani)* ICA Ramp Projects, University of Pennsylvania, January -March, 2007. http://www.lucabuvoli.com/ramp_buvoli_final-1.pdf. 25/01/2010.

nostalgic – of all that in 1913 Marinetti called psychology, which he deemed a dirty thing and a dirty word.³⁸

Spirituality is now scrutinised in art in reference to the flying man. He is a man who loses his identity by merging with the machine, but at the same time participates with it to achieve the miracle of the aerial dimension. In his essay *Spiritualità Futurista* Fillia describes how the aerial dimension transforms the man.³⁹ The machine has to represent the sensibility of human beings and the colours in the painting symbolise a psychological condition. In *Il cuore del pilota* (Figure 39 - The Heart of the Pilot, 1933) by Mino delle Site, the main theme becomes the feeling and psychology of the aviator. The title of the work by Domenico Belli *Volo introspettivo* (Figure 95 - Introspective Flight, 1934) is self-explanatory. The psychology of the aviator is the fulcrum of the representation. In *La spiritualità dell'aviatore* (Figure 38 - 1929) by Fillia the pilot is not represented as a powerful hero anymore but the delicate atmosphere of the painting is more directed towards the introspective investigation of the man/aviator. Even the sexuality of the aviator is explored in a context in which woman is not demonised but is delicately portrayed in her maternal nature as the companion of the man/pilot as evident in *L'amante dell'aviatore* (Figure 40 - The Aviator's Mistress, 1936) by Regina.

Spirituality also had a further level of significance for Aeropittura that has not escaped Buvoli's thorough analysis. The Futurists developed their religious painting from 1931, the year in which the manifesto of Futurist sacred art was published. Buvoli flirts with this religious theme in his video *Adapting One Sense's to High Altitude Flight* in which visual reference to religious icons participates in the dialectical relationship between man, machine and flight. This could not be more appropriate. Futurist religious painting has always been

³⁸ Poggi, *Inventing Futurism*, p. 151.

³⁹ Fillia, "Spiritualità Futurista", *Oggi e Domani*, Rome, 26 October 1931.

considered a mere celebration in painting of the relationship between the Vatican and Fascism. Nevertheless the Futurists' concern with religion was more a consequence of what they considered the miraculous power of technology and the mystical suggestions generated from the potential and experience of flight rather than from authentic forms of sacred beliefs. This aspect also seems to surface in Buvoli's work as well. The sculpture of the flying human being in the Biennale can be interpreted as representing the artist's awareness of the power of suggestion represented in his secular amalgamation of the evocative experience of flight and a religious symbol. Not least, the elevated spot of the sculpture at the end of a space that could easily resemble a church nave does not seem to be coincidental. Even from this point of view the relationship between human being/machine/flight seems to become more entangled. Moreover, this figurative reference was attempted by some Futurist painters as in Nino Vitali's *Ascensione* (Figure 96 - Ascension, 1930s).

In Buvoli's work, man is not represented in his undivided relationship with the machine but in his transformation as a result of the intimate knowledge of the outstanding potential of technology. The result could be a human being who has already incorporated the mechanical attributes or, conversely, who has finally liberated himself by the constriction of the machine. This dialectic between a mechanised man and humanised machine pervades through much of the 1930s in Futurist art. The veneration of the machine converts the machine itself into a symbol with its mystery in which the possibility of recognising a spiritual essence is more a reality than a prospect.

The Flying Training

However, in *Flying Practical Training for Beginners* Buvoli abandons the machine completely. The artist's fascination with flight goes back to his childhood. His father was a

pilot in the Second World War and in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition there are photographs of documents related to his father's job as a pilot. The project is composed of two different phases (*Beginners and Intermediate*) that could correspond to two different periods: one pre 9/11 and the other post. As in the case of the previous works, the whole project consists of a mix of drawing, animation and sculptures/objects. Buvoli states that in the later project he is more concentrated on pondering issues related to the idea of control and/in flight. During the moments that immediately followed the terrorist attack, Buvoli explained how it became problematic to move around the US and Europe carrying all his drawing and sketches that include illustration and diagrams. He realised how the whole experience of flight now had more to do with control and power than fascination and freedom. While the first phase of the training (*Beginners*) appears as a creative and liberating enterprise, the second (*Intermediate*) emerges as a more formal and, to some extent, militarised experience. Indeed the idea of control very much permeated the whole project. Here the artist plays with the idea of the body and the desire to fly without the support of any mechanical device. Buvoli focused on the role of a fictional character, Professor M.a.S., who teaches a utopian project of unassisted human flight (Figure 97). As the website describes:

The Professor demonstrates a series of movements which, when performed correctly, allow one to fly without the aid of any mechanical devices. The seriousness of the professor's presentation allows the viewer to momentarily defer judgements about the absurdity of the enterprise and become caught up in the hopes and aspirations represented by the Professor's quest.⁴⁰

The success of this unassisted human flight is strictly dependent on the controls exerted on the human body. Buvoli treats the body as an operating machine. At first sight this process seems very close to the transformation in the imperishable and mechanical Futurist man. On

⁴⁰ MIT Visual Centre, *Luca Buvoli: Flying - Practical Training for Beginners*, 2000. <http://listart.mit.edu/node/279>. Access 25/01/2010.

the other hand, it is not a man being empowered by the machine but a body that finds the necessary resources from within his very human nature. It can actually be interpreted as the inverted process of celebrating the intrinsic power of the human body. As a part of the visual apparatus of this flying course Buvoli created paintings and sculptures of *Vectors*, according to his terminology, that will be also part of the Biennale installation. What are they? Trajectories? Beams of light? Streaks behind the flight?

As mentioned above, in the later period, Futurist fascination with the machine finds its correspondence and visual reference in the aeroplane as the most advanced form of technology. However, according to the *Aeropittura* manifesto the aeroplane did not have to be included in the representation. Fillia stated that neither mechanical elements nor the surrounding landscape should appear in the painting. However, the artists often describe the physical effect of flight on the surrounding space: the trajectory and the lights. Works such as *Il fulmine* (Figure 29 - The Lightning, 1932) by Alessandro Bruschetti and Acquaviva's *Aeroraccordi* (Figure 98 - Aero-Links, 1938) seem to represent the effects of flight on the natural world and the romantic suggestions of these environmental alterations as a part of the celebrative attitude and fascination of *Aeropittura* towards flight. The Futurist aeropainters had strong belief in the possibility and opportunities offered by the experience of flight and the works reflect this celebrative and positive attitude. The format of the manifesto conveys the artists' unproblematic, pragmatic and positive attitude towards their art. Conversely, Buvoli does not have any answers, but only questions. This passage taken from the catalogue that accompanies the video *Flying* reinforces the general feeling of uncertainty that permeates the whole project.

What is the film really about? About the change from not-a-Superhero into a real Superhero? Or a step back from Not-a-Superhero to before one could become one, instructions on how to become one (a not-a-superhero or a real superhero?) Is it an

upgrading or a flashback? Is it a master who teaches these techniques to not a super hero? Who is the master? Besides authority, what does he represent? Is this guru/coach actually teaching him something or letting him to discover what he already has?⁴¹

The supposedly liberating experience has instead constricted the human body and has been transformed into a militarised experience.

The idea of liberating the body from the constriction and law of terrestrial gravity was also prominent in Aeropittura, and the utopian aspiration of overcoming the limiting terrestrial dimension is recurrent in the artists' works and writings. *Superamento terrestre* (Figure 99 - Terrestrial Overcoming, 1930-1931) *Senso di gravità* (Figure 100 - Feel of Gravity, 1932) and *Più pesante dell'aria* (Figure 47 - Heavier than Air, 1933-1934) by Fillia are only some of the paintings where this idea is manifest. Buvoli conceives and draws the instructions to guide the body through this empowering experience. The diagrams that Buvoli creates to describe the movements that the body must perform in order to achieve the flying dimension are only useful as part of this liberating process. Buvoli produces a cage like structure for the body in order to liberate it. The oxymoron that lies behind Buvoli's work is well evident here. Paradoxically, this seems very close to his academic experience in Venice and the anatomical drawing he was teaching. The apparent excess of technical aims reveals the final aspiration of eliminating the structure.

The idea of deskilling is therefore resurfacing here. Buvoli is liberating the body and providing it with the freedom it desires. As mentioned above, the process of liberation needs to go through phases of constriction, training and control. The idea of control permeates the experience of flight in all sorts of different and possibly unrelated ways. In the 1930s, when aviation reached the peak of its popularity, flight was an indispensable means of warfare in

⁴¹ Luca Buvoli, *Flying Practical Training for Intermediates (notes: 1997-2002)* (Portland: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2002), p. 23.

which the reconnaissance mission and control of the territory played a vital role. In the Second World War the terrifying aspect of flight and the potential destructive power of an elevated position and vision were fully exposed. Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* introduces the concept of the 'malignity of vision': "Vision was still the privileged sense, but what privilege produces in the modern world was damned as almost entirely pernicious".⁴² Aeropittura engaged with representation from above but the disastrous consequences that flight caused as a warfare tool in the Second World War have perpetuated the negative judgment of a movement that celebrated this aim. The symbolic suggestions of flight were totally neglected in favour of an obsessive analysis of the political and military issues related to aviation and flight. However, in Aeropittura writings and works, the reference to warfare activities is only limited to a restricted production and a manifesto that was produced around the 1940s. Instead, the representation from above introduced by Aeropittura belongs to the space of the imagination, the cosmic idealism and the utopian world and space created by an artistic mind.

The dominant characteristics of Aeropittura are therefore delineated. Through an absolute freedom of fantasy and an obsessive desire to encompass the multi-dynamism and the indispensable synthesis will represent the immense visionary and sensorial drama of flight.⁴³

Friedrich Nietzsche proposes a positive idea of the elevated view when he talks about the elevated position of Athenians in the theatre. It is not surveillance, but seeing beyond - looking beyond the ordinary world. To this extent an elevated position can correspond to a positive improvement. In the same way, the role of the imagination plays a crucial part in Buvoli's training: "Locate yourself in it. There is no stable support under your feet, no ceiling

⁴² Gary Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision. Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 294.

⁴³ *Manifesto dell'Aeropittura* (1929). "Si delineano così i caratteri dominanti dell'Aeropittura che, mediante una libertà assoluta di fantasia e un ossessionante desiderio di abbracciare la molteplicità dinamica con la più indispensabile delle sintesi, fisserà l'immenso dramma visionario e sensibile del volo".

above your head. Alternate your presence in the two areas and familiarize yourself with the transition between them”.⁴⁴ It is the space of imagination where pragmatic actions are performed in mental and imaginative spaces.

Not only imagination but also the physical experience embedded in the action of flight was indispensable for Aeropittura. The idea and representation of movement had a central role in Aeropittura poetics to the point that they theorized a double movement. Point number seven in the Aeropittura manifesto states that “every aeropainting simultaneously contains the double movement of the aeroplane and the hand of the painter that moves pencil, brush and diffuser”.⁴⁵ In the same way, although utopian and improbable, the experience described by Buvoli in his work should be primarily physical. He included a whole series of body actions such as inhalation, coordination and concentration.

While in the works described so far Buvoli uses the human body as the only means of defeating gravity, in *Instant Before Incident* created by Buvoli for the Susan Inglett Gallery in New York the artist produced an installation based on Marinetti’s car crash of 1908 (Figure 103). Essays such as *Prosthetic Gods* by Hal Foster and *Crash* by Jeffrey Schnapp analyse this event that seems to be fundamental in Marinetti’s conception of the notion of Futurism.⁴⁶ In 1908, during his first drive, Marinetti lost control of his car and the excitement and feeling resulting from that experience contributed to the origin of the first Futurist manifesto. This was also the end of his adventure as a driver since, apparently, Marinetti did not drive again after that thrilling first driving experience. For the exhibition *Futurism 100* at the Estorick Collection in London Buvoli created a mural version of the sculpture in New York (Figure

⁴⁴ Luca Buvoli, *Flying Practical Training for Beginners. The 33-step method based on Aerodynamic Research Developed and Presented by Prof. M.a.S.* (Cambridge: MIT List Visual Art Centre, 1999), [Page numbers not given].

⁴⁵ *Manifesto dell’Aeropittura* (1929). “Ogni aeropittura continene simultaneamente il doppio movimento dell’aeroplano e della mani del pittore che muove matita, pennello e diffusore”.

⁴⁶ Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (London: The Mit Press, 2004); Jeffrey T. Schnapp, “Crash. Speed as Engine of Individuation”, *Modernism/Modernity* 6(1), January 1999, pp. 1-49.

104). He returns to the origin to the very moment when everything started. The mural is created in the language of comic and the painted motion sequence resembles the very essence of the style of Futurism. "I have adopted several tactics to represent movement while attempting to slow it down, the car is condensed as a trope of representation of velocity; it is stretched, squashed and extended like a cartoon character, yet it is constituted by delay".⁴⁷ Buvoli wants to represent the moment before the collision by suspending time. It can either be interpreted as the time of ecstasy in which Marinetti was experiencing the force of velocity or, on the other hand, the waiting for the inevitable tragic event. Paul Virilio, often mentioned by Buvoli as one of his cultural influences, states that the accident is diagnostic of technology. The existence of technology itself implies the happening of an inevitable event that could be categorised as an accident and having devastating consequences on the entire world. It can be speculated that the current stage of the technological world in which we are living is represented by the precise moment before this accident happens. The interruption and suspension of time underlines the precariousness of the contemporary human condition. Recent studies have compared the apocalyptic atmosphere of the 1930s with the presage of an imminent disaster in contemporary culture. This perspective was omitted from the Futurist ideology in that period. Futurism embraced an utter positive and utopian attitude towards technology and future. While Futurism celebrated movement and flight in their positive and optimistic aspects, it becomes clearer why Buvoli refers to his work as a 'Futurism without optimism'. The precariousness and the presage of an imminent disaster are also inherent in Buvoli's work at the 2007 Venice Biennale.

⁴⁷ "A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow. Christine Poggi talks to Luca Buvoli about his 'Meta-Futurist' project", *Modern Painters*, February 2009, p. 59.

A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow

The 52nd Venice Biennale curated by Robert Storr was entitled *Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind*. For this, Buvoli was commissioned to create a multimedia project called *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow (Un Bellissimo Dopodomani)* in the Arsenale's rooms. The monumental architectonic space in the Arsenale gave Buvoli the opportunity to implement some ideas about display drawn from his observation of the catalogues of 1930s exhibitions. This work was initially presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia between January and March 2007. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's words *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow*, used by Buvoli as a title, were addressed to Marinetti's daughter as part of a prophecy on the future during a tragic time in his personal life and in Italian history. The country was disastrously divided between the Allies in the south of Italy and the Nazi and Fascist forces concentrated around the *Repubblica di Salò* in the north. It was also a very difficult time for the Futurist movement itself. Marinetti must have realised that although he had a special relationship with Mussolini, the movement that he founded was barely tolerated by the regime and the previous events that, according to Marinetti, were supposed to be a celebration of Futurism, actually included Futurism only marginally, as in the Fascist revolution exhibition. Buvoli attempts to deflate the rhetoric behind Marinetti's positive statement and, at the same time, to underline the uncertainty and disillusion hidden behind those words.

The first room is entitled *Anachroheroism*:

For Buvoli, the euphoria of flight is as spectacular as the danger. The project's initial phase explores aesthetic as well as political aspects of aeronautics. Dynamic vector lines and an idealized, mechanized flying human shape surround the viewer upon entering the Arsenale,

while handmade propaganda posters and mosaics rise along the walls.⁴⁸

By naming the first phase, Buvoli already contradicts Marinetti's unjustified optimism for the future. The theme of flight, which incorporated the idea of heroism, violence and war, is presented with its potential tragic consequences. At the same time, Buvoli flirts with the fascination of danger; there is a level of seduction in the use of colours, fonts, suggestion and powerful grandiosity of the scene as in the sculpture of the heroic body hanging from the wall (Figure 102). It is the gigantic shape of a flying human body discussed above. The position of this sculpture in the Arsenale space is intentional and strategic. Buvoli uses one of the symbols of Futurism as an opening statement. The car in *Instant Before Incident* is deployed by the artist to represent speed and velocity and is also a way to contextualise his work and to impress the viewer with an opening statement. In the opening space at the Biennale, Buvoli makes a clear reference to flight as the main theme of this work. This impressive sculpture at the entrance is a disquieting shape of a genderless human being. The effect is that one feels controlled and overwhelmed by the presence. Somehow Buvoli is introducing another aspect to flight which is related neither to the suggestions resulting from elevated perspective nor to the idea of control inherent in the vision from above. The spatial location is reversed and Buvoli is now concerned with the impact of flight on terrestrial space where the powerless human being feels controlled and under surveillance by a de-personified presence who oversees and dominates the space. Although it is an inverse process the reference is again to the dialectic duality vision/control.

In the same first room, on the two sidewalls, Buvoli creates a selection of what he calls 'propaganda posters' (Figure 101). The choice of poster is not casual. As Scudiero states in his analysis of Italian aviation posters produced between 1910 and 1943:

⁴⁸ *Project Description*. <http://www.lucabuvoli.com/html/Biennale/Biennale.html>. Access 25/01/2010.

Over time, the poster was to prove itself to be an almost inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists and graphic designers. For its part, the poster constituted a powerful tool for spreading awareness of this new means of transport and at the same time, was a useful ally in giving flesh to a myth of modernity, an aerial mysticism for a new era of conquests and discoveries.⁴⁹

Buvoli manipulates the posters, the colours are fading, letters collapsing and the language is hesitant and fragmented. He also changes the physicality of the medium by imbuing the poster with a three-dimensional character. They lose their traditional flat nature, the colours spill over inundating the borders. The artist is not preoccupied in hiding the creation process: the posters are not firmly fixed on the wall (the only supports are often some very visually unpleasant drawing pins) and the frame is often either missing or broken. Buvoli does not only deploy the poster within its traditional nature to convey further meaning but he questions the message by challenging the medium.

The subtle critique and deconstruction culminates in the second room where everything is collapsing. The 'vectors', sculpture that represent velocity, are deconstructed in this room entitled *Entanglement of Modernist Myths*. What is left of these vectors is anchored to the ceiling, they are imprisoned, no longer capable of symbolising the flight anymore (Figure 105; Figure 106). Buvoli slows down and arrests flight in the same way as in *Instant Before Incident* he arrests the car. His celebration of slowness seems to permeate every aspect of this project including the videos.

Buvoli's video presents the viewer with a montage of contemporary interviews and historical film footage of the Fascist era, crowds hailing Mussolini and a newspaper burning, hand-drawn and animated scenes (including one of Marinetti dropping Futurist manifestos from the Clock Tower in Venice), a 1927 parade for

⁴⁹ Maurizio Scudiero, "Epic Resonances, Dynamic Impulses and the Needs of Propaganda: The Aviation Poster 1910-1943" in *Planespotting. Italian Aviation Posters 1910-1943* (New York: Publicity & Print Press, 2002), p. 7.

aviator Charles Lindbergh, views of a 2005 aeronautical show, flags held by American soldiers marching in 'Operation Welcome Home' in 2006, Italian crowds at the World Soccer Final, and menacing smoke rings produced by bombs used in a re-enactment of WWII operations. As the video nears its conclusion, it seems to encounter resistance: the sound track slows so that the refrain of the patriotic song becomes garbled, while the whirling propellers wind down. The final echoes of the song convey a sense of spatial and temporal distance.⁵⁰

At the beginning of the video the artist plays with the suggestion of an Italian popular song but as the sound is gradually distorted the sense of disquiet in the spectator increases. Disillusion is all that is left of the fascination with flying and its potentialities. The slowness and distortion of the scene create a sense of unease. By combining contemporary images and archival footage, Buvoli draws parallels between contemporary and past events, collective myths and rites. The artist is not interested in openly engaging with a political critique but the constant subtle reference to communication is clearly a reference to the political and cultural situation in contemporary Italy dominated by the importance of media control. The idea of rupture and alienation permeates this video and is patent in the fracture between the words and the sound, the incongruity between the visual and sound elements of the video. The corrupted sound resembles the alienation of the spectator when revisiting some traumatic historical events (like the occasion in which the black shirts were burning newspaper as shown in the archival footage). The video finishes with the fall of the hero, the disintegration of forms in which the flight is finally arrested and stopped. However the celebration of slowness that pervades the work can be considered one of the most successful operations in Buvoli's installation. This process of 'deceleration' is explored in the video *Velocity Zero* and immediately perceivable in the oxymoron constituted by the title.

⁵⁰ Poggi, *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow*, ICA Ramp Projects.

Velocity Zero

In elaborating this video Buvoli worked in strict collaboration with language pathologists while he was filming people with aphasia reading aloud Marinetti's manifesto (Figure 107).

The project's description states:

Their slowed speech – transformed into fragmented animated sequences – mirror the readers' attempts to fluently capture the text. Their moving struggle deflates the Manifesto's praise of speed and aggression and continues Buvoli's reading of Futurism from a post-utopian perspective.⁵¹

The video attempts to undermine the associated rhetoric and violence of Marinetti's text. The slow pace of the speakers and the hesitation in the pronunciation contribute the creation of a distinct sense of frustration, anxiety and discomfort. By losing its speed, the text reveals its absurdity. There is a breaking in temporality between the sound of the words and the text that appears on the screen as subtitles. The temporal and spatial fragmentation finds its visual correspondence in the dotted and scattered line added by the artist in his attempt to portray the speakers. Their corporeality is not completely obliterated and the continuous appearance and disappearance of these ghostly and fragmented bodies reinforces the discomfort and uneasiness produced by the sound. *Velocity Zero* represents Buvoli's constant preoccupation with, and renegotiation between, the notions of text spoken word and corporeality.

Performing declamations of text was common practice in Futurist poetics. *Serate Futuriste* (Futurist Nights) were animated events held in theatres where, among other activities, that often included fights and exchanges of insults, various Futurist texts were publicly recited. Buvoli proposes a similar experience with an inverted effect: the resistance of the text to be

⁵¹ *Project Description*, <http://www.lucabuvoli.com/html/Biennale/Biennale.html>. Access 25/01/2010.

declaimed resembles our resistance to embrace the message. Moreover, the notion of control and communication that accompanies the entire project, is subtly present in the way the speakers need to control and discipline their performance and body to convey a message. In some of the earlier versions of the video, Buvoli decided to fully show the body and face of the speakers. However, the visual impact of the specific individual was too strong. The distortion of the mouth and the patient's physical struggle to pronounce the words would have distracted attention from the whole experience. The artist decided then to superimpose his hand drawings to mitigate the effect.

At first sight *Velocity Zero* may come across as a very simple work, however, how to deal with the corporeality of the speakers was only one of the many small and precise decisions that the artist made in reference to this piece. Other elements were a matter of consideration, such as the background sound, the angle of the camera, and the relationship with the text. The artist experimented with different background sounds from music to just the breathing of the people in their effort at pronunciation. The point was to make the virtual space of the speakers more effective. In particular, the camera angle deployed in the video has been associated with the traditional perspective from which Mussolini was always filmed in propaganda films. It was a point of view that was supposed to convey an imposing and overpowering presence. Because of the relevance of the textual reference, the artist carefully selected the typeface for the text of the manifesto that appears at the bottom of the screen. He opted for a hybrid between the print type used in the first publication of the Futurist manifesto in English and that deployed in the first publication of the manifesto in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. The risk of transforming the text into a form of poetry, if perceived in its abstractness, was a major preoccupation for the artist. If the sound had become too detached from the meaning, the project could have turned into a form of concrete poetry and

aestheticising the performance would have prevented the deflation of the text's violence. The artist states:

Paradoxically, one of the ideas I had in the process of realising this work was that I would have the speakers read not only the Futurist manifesto but also *Parole in Libertà*. And at the beginning I actually spent days with them reading other documents. One of the problems was that they were already too close to this assembling of Futurist syntaxes. The proximity between visual concrete poetry and the reading would have negated my attempt, my desire to dismantle the violence itself.⁵²

The video has been subjected to heavy digitisation but at the same time the hand drawing of the artist reintroduced the human presence. This heavy digitisation is more a consequence of a random event than a conscious choice. In *Velocity Zero* Buvoli faced some problems when, on arrival in Venice to set up the Biennale's installation, he discovered that the colours on the screen were blurred, probably due to the light of the projector. Buvoli downloaded the compressed video online but when he opened it the line was digitised, it was not the crisp line that he had planned. Nevertheless he thought that the unplanned digitisation could add another layer in his dialogue between human and machine and, in the final version, the work was never modified. In the exhibition's brochure for the Estorick Collection in London, Francesca Pietropaolo points out how by "favouring hand-drawing over each frame, the artist celebrates slowness through process." She also adds a further level of interpretation in reference to the entire operation:

The slowing down of language and the difficulty of communication are also employed to symbolically counter the ideology of power and violence that informs our society. Referencing both propaganda and advertising, the format of the manifesto allows here for a timely

⁵² Luca Buvoli, Interview with Elisa Sai, London, January 2009.

critique of the ideologies of control and authority that permeate our everyday life in a media-saturated culture.⁵³

In *Meta-Futurism* the re-skilling process that the artist claimed to have undertaken, also coincided with the extensive use of digital animation although always mixed and superimposed by Buvoli's own drawings and hand-sketched material. Despite his previous resistance to this form of animation, the artist felt legitimised to use it in this project in reference to Futurism. Steve Dixon in *Futurism e-Visited* reports a comment by Giovanni Lista who states: "Futurism is above all a philosophy of becoming, that is expressed by an activism exalting history as progress and celebrating life as the constant evolution of being ... a Futurist of today would be a fan of computer-generated images".⁵⁴ This could also encourage an analysis of the concept of de-skilling in relation to technology: using technology in art can sometimes mean 'hyper- skilling' because of the need for a trained human being to operate with particular technique, but, at the same time, the trace of the human being is eliminated so, in some sense, the process of de-skilling is reinforced.

Language and Text

The dialectical relationship and the juxtaposition between the spoken and the written word in Buvoli's work reached its climax in *Velocity Zero*. Text and language were significant in the Futurist effort to divulge their theories, probably comparable to the communicative power of their art. They produced an incredible amount of documents and manifestos both in the early and later periods of their artistic activity. In his videos Buvoli usually inserts words that pop up on the screen to create lines of communication with other parts of the work and indeed

⁵³ Francesca Pietropaolo, "Slow it Down to the Limit: Futurism at Velocity Zero". Brochure for the exhibition *Velocity Zero*, London (Estorick Collection), 2009.

⁵⁴ Steve Dixon, "Futurism e-visited", 2003. <http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/3no2/Papers/Steve%20Dixon.htm>. Access 25/01/2010.

with different works. These words always carry a particular meaning. For example in *Adapting One's Sense to High Altitude Flight* some of the apparently random words that appear on the video refer to the experience of Buvoli's father in the deportation camp. Another form of text is the use of subtitles often inserted into the videos, as in the case of the manifesto in *Velocity Zero* or the song in *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow*. Because of the importance that the text encompasses in his work, Buvoli not only wants the spectator to have an impression or suggestion produced by the sound, but also he needs them to fully understand all the implications of the text that he is reproducing. Some critics have linked this attention to text with Jacques Lacan's signifying chain.

For Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a string of words in which meaning is constantly deferred from one term to the next. Buvoli effects a similar deferral with his list of terms that glancingly touch on religion, physics, technology and ideology. Their meaning is ultimately in the very movement, the interconnection of roles and concepts.⁵⁵

The language acquires a particular significance and meaning in the part of the Biennale project entitled *How Can This Thing Be Explained?* that Buvoli described as

...two-channel video that compiles selected interviews the artist made with two of Marinetti's daughters and with Futurist scholars in both Italy and the United States to examine the problematic Futurist attitude towards violence as well as their conflicted views on the role of women.⁵⁶

At first, the whole idea of openly acknowledging the controversial political and cultural Futurist ideas in this last phase of the installation could be considered a slippage in the venture of re-reading the movement through a visual and artistic transcription. Moreover Buvoli's engagement with Futurism is very much constituted of allusions, suggestions, visual

⁵⁵ Raphael Rubinstein, "Watching the Sky", *Art in America*, November 2004, pp. 152-154.

⁵⁶ *Project Description*, <http://www.lucabuvoli.com/html/Biennale/Biennale.html>. Access 25/01/2010.

impressions, emotional correspondences and intellectual references. The risk in presenting such an explicit message was to prevent the spectator from filtering and translating all these suggestions into a personal subjective account. The initial response to this overt acknowledgment on the part of the artist of the political and cultural controversies surrounding Futurism might be that it represented his conformity to received conventions of interpreting this period. However, as has been frequently mentioned, language and words are vital to the whole project (the words and letters as sculptures at the entrances, the words in the posters, and the text in *Velocity Zero*). In the case of this particular video, the language develops as a spontaneous process, not directed or controlled by the artist. The speakers are not instructed to recite any predefined text; and the artist does not have a pre-knowledge of the message that was entirely at the speakers' discretion. However, the general impression is that, through cutting and editing, the artist has manipulated their words with the intention of isolating sequences that contained specific terms that could be related to the project as a whole and continue the chain of associations and communication.⁵⁷ This phase also engages with the legitimacy and authority of scientific method and logical thinking. It was previously mentioned how, in another work, Buvoli plays with the fictional character of a professor who teaches an improbable technique for unassisted human flying. The professor and his seriousness contrast with the utopian nature of the message. The professor attempts to convey an improbable theory by using a scientific and rational method. In this way Buvoli estranges the spectator who does not distinguish the fiction from the reality.

Scientific legitimacy was also extremely important for the Futurists. A series of articles titled *Dimostrazione scientifica del Futurismo* appeared in the periodical *Futurismo* in 1934 and

⁵⁷ According to the artist, there is not change in the context of meaning of the scholar's position. The scholars themselves found "the final version very respectful of their individual positions. My animated/drawn layering actually operates on a parallel level where the almost subliminal link and inversion acquire sense but does not disrupt the credibility of the comments" (Luca Buvoli, 11 July 2009).

other scientific theories in relation to flying were also regularly published in the Futurist periodicals.⁵⁸ By introducing an intervention over the videos with the scholars, who are considered the depositary of the knowledge of Futurism, Buvoli seems to question the value of the scientific and rational approach as a means of understanding. If in *Velocity Zero* the speakers are unable to pronounce the words, in this video there is not the physical inability but the inability to providing a definitive answer. It finishes with a question, an open end: *How Can This Thing Be Explained?* Also in the video *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow* the artist inserts abstracts of his interviews with the scholars in the pop up form experimented with in previous works. This constitutes a sort of intellectual introduction of the video where Buvoli presents what can be interpreted as his own ‘elaborated’ version of the scholars’ performance. After proposing an academic and intellectual reference to the topic, a whole sequence of free association begins. The artist presents the rational side of the argument but with his subjective reading he then suggests an artistic alternative. The issue of power and control in communication re-emerge here together with a critique of the scientific method as incapable of providing an answer. At the same time Buvoli seems fascinated by the possibilities offered by a scientific approach and by intellectual reasoning as a means of understanding. Buvoli maintains a deep relationship with science, similarly to the Futurists as the previous chapters in this thesis demonstrate. He is undertaking a project with NASA that will involve the use of technical equipment.

I’m fascinated by the rigorous, systematic approach to the discipline that science embraces. However, I engage in a constant dialogue an approach based on the empirical method but at the same time I play with the empirical approach to knowledge itself, the desire and the pleasure to expand knowledge.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ruggiero Michelsoni, “Dimostrazione Scientifica del Futurismo”, *Futurismo*, (15 March, 1934, p. 8), (1 April, 1934, p. 5), (15 April, 1934, p. 5), (15 May 1934, p. 5), (1 June 1934, p. 2), (15 June 1934, p. 5).

⁵⁹ Buvoli, Interview with Elisa Sai, London, 2009.

The artist presents his own re-reading of Futurism that involves the fascination with flight that was so significant in Aeropittura, but in his journey the artist accompanies the spectator and shows him all the possible terrifying and unsettling aspects of flight. This includes flight as a means to control territory and as a tool in warfare. Representation and emblems of flight are also deployed to symbolise the culture of control and surveillance in our society. Flight has also been taken as a case study to meditate technology, which played an important role for Futurist artists who invested technology with a series of symbolical values including the notion of the sublime, danger and unlimited power and mystical nature. In his work, Buvoli embraces technology and the opportunities offered by the computer and digital art. He also ponders the significance of technology in Futurist poetics in his reference both to two futurist technological symbols: the car and the aeroplane. At the same time he explores the implications of technology in communication structures and art. Due to its ongoing development, the discourse on technology and its role in communication theories continues to fascinate and engage both scholars and the public more generally. Some of the past utopias and promises of technology have generated disillusion. Marshall McLuhan's idea of a 'global village' in which television should have favoured access and exchange of information have often resulted in the abnormal influence of propaganda and advertising.⁶⁰ The discussion has now turned to the Internet and its power and it is significant to examine how this dialogue is structured in art. The human and the mechanical are in constant renegotiation in Buvoli's work as it was for the Futurists. They embraced technology with the intention of creating an indestructible human being, but they also proposed a constant return to the human in the later period. The machine is invested with mortal characteristics and the artists are more concerned

⁶⁰See Andrew Feenberg, *Critical Theory of Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

with tracing and representing the machine's spiritual elements rather than its inexhaustible power.

Buvoli questions the Futurist media and aims, such as the use of posters, not only by manipulating the message within but also by challenging the nature of the medium itself. He also engages with the codes of display and communication employed in the Futurist monumental aspirations. The dialectical relationship with a scientific approach constitutes a significant element in Buvoli's work. The artist disavows any claim of scientificity made by the Futurists in relation to their art. Instead, he questions rationality as a valid epistemological approach to the controversial and problematic issues inherent in the Futurist ideology. Buvoli's *Meta-Futurism* proposes a comprehensive investigation of Futurist poetics succeeding where often reception and traditional forms of analysis have proved insufficient. The project engages with the spectator from a conceptual as well as perceptual perspective. Buvoli flirts with the potential fascination and seduction of Futurist aesthetics and strategies, but by deconstructing codes, practices and methods, the artist succeeds in deflating the violence and destroys the rhetoric. Futurism borrowed from different cultural and artistic sources in the same way Buvoli absorbs, combines and freely transforms motives drawn from contemporary art theory, popular culture, personal and collective memory, philosophy, technology, communication theory, historical occurrences and scientific method.

The artist claims not to be interested in openly engaging in any political and social critique but he uses Futurism as an occasion to explore issues of the power of communication and media control both in the past and contemporary Italian society, as well as exploring his cultural and personal background and American society, his everyday life reality. He compares the complexity of Futurism with the complexity and ambiguity of the society that generated the movement in a continuous exchange between the past and the present that are re-enacted through the medium of art rather than traditional forms of investigations.

Interestingly, his work is at his weakest when it incorporates verbal analysis. It is possible that art can best be explained by art.

Conclusion

The significance of time to Futurist ideology was unambiguously expressed from its very inception in the name that Marinetti gave to his movement. The celebration of the future and rejection of the past emphatically claimed in the manifesto constitute two key points of reference for a discussion of the concept of time and its dialectical exploration by the Futurists. Concurrently throughout the entire development of Futurism, artists were also preoccupied with an exploration of space. The fundamental role of the ideas of space and time in twentieth-century cultural and scientific discourse significantly impacted upon aspects of Futurist production. Issues related to spatiality extensively investigated in the Futurist aesthetic include the position and involvement of the spectator in the scene, the attempt to expand the pictorial space and the theorization and creation of new physical space in architecture. Architecture, theatre, painting and sculpture were brought together to shape and communicate a Futurist vision of space, its representation and production.

In this respect, *Aeropittura* represents the latest development and culmination of Futurist artistic investigation and experimentation related to the theme of space. If the very name 'Futurism' reveals a preoccupation with time, 'Aeropittura' introduces a more spatial conception. 'Painting of (or from) the Air' describes both the subject of this production as well as a spatial location appropriated by the artists through a physical experience of space and its consequent artistic representation. However, as discussed throughout this thesis, *Aeropittura's* reference to flight and experience of space have proven difficult for academic and scholarly criticism to digest. If Futurism faced many problems in obtaining a generally positive reception, the situation for *Aeropittura* was even more complicated. While early Futurism's upsurge in the cultural scene was considered a positive innovation and provided a

much-needed example of modernization, late Futurism was never regarded as entirely successful by its contemporaries and this assessment did not significantly improve over time. In the aftermath of the Second World War and for a long period after the excessive attention paid to the artists' political associations and their support of the Fascist regime's military activities resulted in a loss of focus on the main themes explored by Aeropittura. The heterogeneous and ambiguous nature of Aeropittura, hovering ambivalently between a figurative and an abstract language, further exacerbated an already problematic reception. Limiting critical discussion to the political context was often considered a valid and exhaustive approach. Moreover, the critics and scholars who initiated a more comprehensive analysis of late Futurism faced the arduous challenge of re-evaluating the artworks in the postwar period when its figurative language and reference to tradition were often connected with the official art of totalitarian regimes. Additionally, contemporary artists were experimenting with alternative forms of abstraction and a strong preference for an emergent conceptual art served to generate a distorted and negative perception of some of the works produced in the interwar era. Aeropittura's hybrid language, neither completely abstract nor entirely figurative, struggled to establish itself both among its contemporaries and in the later period. The initial response to this circumstance, the fragmenting of the movement into different phases or periods, has been abandoned in recent criticism. Yet, despite the fact that Futurism is now presented as an uninterrupted artistic expression that lasted almost forty years, attention paid to the late developments is very limited.

By making constant reference to key figures of Futurism such as Umberto Boccioni and Antonio Sant'Elia, the artists involved in Aeropittura underlined their relationship with the early developments of the movement, yet at the same time they claimed originality in reference to their artistic production. The popularization of scientific ideas such as the notion of a fourth dimension constituted a source of inspiration for these artists, and enabled them to

enrich previous cultural references and inspiration with innovative technological inventions and up-to-date scientific theories. The expansion of space advocated by the Futurists, also part of a broad international cultural and artistic discourse, was both physically experienced by the artists through the practice of flight and then imaginatively theorized in their writings. The Futurists enthusiastically believed that technology could enlarge the boundaries of human perception. Aeropittura accordingly represented a platform from which artists could express, in the privileged visual perception of the terrestrial space, an unconventional physical experience of aerial space that was also considered as a form of appropriation and therefore legitimation.

Through visual representations of landscapes from above the artists not only demonstrated their spatial superiority and power of control, but also developed several strategies to communicate alternative forms of spatiality in artistic terms. The idea of synthesis, crucial throughout the entire development of Futurism, found expression in abstract and geometric forms that were deployed to represent different conditions and elements of the possible experience of space such as movement, immobility, spatial borders and infinite spaces. Moreover the sublime feelings generated from this privileged perspective on the earth resulted in an awareness and fascination with the idea of nature, until then completely ignored by the highly mechanized Futurist approach. The exhibitions and writing on *Naturismo* contribute to a more socially based discussion about the interaction between mankind, the natural world and the machine. The dialectical relationship between organic and mechanical was extensively explored in art and the physical experience was not only epitomized by the artists' discovery of new space through flight but also expressed through experimentation and a deployment of different materials in art. The artists' concern with a more 'environmental' notion of space was evident in the recuperation of architectural ideas and attention to display and internal spaces. Through *plastica murale* and *polimaterismo* the

artists attempted to find an alternative form of artistic expression and techniques that could articulate and symbolize their desire for an expansion of artistic practices and spaces. With *plastica murale* new industrial material found application although often disguised as natural and organic substances. An analysis of the various exhibitions organized in the 1930s shows the Futurists' innovative approach to space in their reconstruction of indoor environments through the deployment of original artistic techniques. The easel and canvas lost their importance and art became more site specific. Concurrently the Futurists did not show any interest in the social and moral aspect of mural art that, conversely, constituted the ideological base for contemporary mural art produced by other artists. In Futurist mural art, unlike other art projects involving mural practices, the artist could not be an anonymous craftsman: the authorship needed to be openly declared and the artist's role as distinctive creator could not be undermined.

After the Second World War several artists recuperated the main themes of late Futurism. Despite not referencing Aeropittura's ideology directly, they developed aspects of late Futurist aesthetics in a language that was more positively received. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the embryonic conceptual style proposed in art was openly acknowledged to have been inspired by some of the late Futurist ideas about space and materiality. Recent artistic contributions have confirmed the artistic continuity within the Futurist aesthetic proposed by the critics and at the same time contemporary artworks and installations have broadened the discussion including themes that were normally the focus of more conventional forms of criticism. Despite the problematic scholarly reception of Futurism, contemporary art bypasses any form of categorisation, division or prejudice and concentrates on the analysis and impact of Futurist themes, ideas and principles. In this respect late Futurism in general, and Aeropittura specifically, can be considered as the natural development and culmination of Futurist artistic practices.

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Archival Material

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Fondo Crali
Cra. 1. 300

Cra. 1. 383

Cra. 1. 384

Cra. 1. 385	Cra. 6. 271	Cra. 9. 387
Cra. 1. 387	Cra. 6. 277	Cra. 10. 295
Cra. 1. 388	Cra. 6. 297	Cra. 13. 146
Cra. 2. 225	Cra. 7. 127	Cra. 13. 202
Cra. 2. 225	Cra. 7. 193	Cra. 13. 203
Cra. 3. 364	Cra. 7. 251	Cra. 13. 208
Cra. 3. 478	Cra. 8. 123	Cra. 13. 209
Cra. 4. 154	Cra. 8. 24	Cra. 13. 210
Cra. 6. 237	Cra. 8. 54	Cra. 13. 87
Cra. 6. 258	Cra. 9. 218	

Fondo Carrà

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Car. _2_0126-127.TIF	Car. II.1100
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Car II 1978	Car. III 112-113
Car. II.245	Car. III.121
Car. II.466.	

Fondo Severini

Sev. I.2.83.I	Sev. V.15
Sev. I.2.83.3	Sev. V.37
Sev. I.2.114.2.	Sev. GSF VII
Sev. III.2.119.I	Sev. GSF VII. 9 1954
Sev. III.2.119.II	

Fondo Somenzi:

Som. I. 1.35	Som. I.13.3	Som. IX.3.6.
Som. I. 1 36	Som. II.1.5	Som. IX.3.8
Som. I. 4. 31	Som. III.27.2	Som. IX.3.9
Som. I.4 .25	Som. III.27.2	Som. IX.3.10
Som. I. 5. 1	Som. III.2.6	Som. IX.3.12
Som. I. 5. 2	Som. IX. 2.2	Som. IX.3.18
Som. I. 6.9	Som. IX.2.12	Som. IX.3.20
Som. I.11.1	Som. IX. 3. 3	Som IX.12
Som. I.13.2.	Som. IX.3.5.	

Fondo Mazzoni

- Volume 1D**
- Volume 2D**
- Volume D6**
- Volume 9D**
- Volume 10D**
- Volume 11D**
- Volume 14D**
- Volume 15D**

Other Collections

Ang.14/11
Dep_ES7_P28 bis
Dep_ES7_P29 bis
Dep_ES9_P03 bis
Dep_ES9_P03
Dep_ES-VI-P02BIS
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Dep_ES9_P05
Dep_ES9_P05 bis
Dep_ES9_P06
Dep_ES9_P07

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Figure 1 Enrico Prampolini, *Aeroritratto simultaneo di Italo Balbo* (Italo Balbo's Simultaneous Aero-Portrait), 1940. Wolfson collection, Genoa.



Figure 2 Fedele Azari, *Prospettive di volo* (Perspective in Flight), 1926. Private collection, Rome.



Figure 3 Umberto Boccioni, *I rumori della strada invadono la casa* (Street Noises Invade the House), 1911. Kunstmuseum, Hannover.



Figure 4 Carlo Carrà, *I funerali dell'anarchico Galli* (The Funeral of the Anarchic Galli), 1911. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 5 Umberto Boccioni, *Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio* (Unique Forms of Continuity in Space), 1913. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 6 Alfredo Ambrosi, *Il volo su Vienna* (Flight Over Vienna), 1933. Il Palazzo del Quirinale, Rome.



Figure 7 Mario Sironi, *Il volo su Vienna* (Flight Over Vienna), 1925. Private collection, Rome.



Figure 8 Filippo Masoero, *Veduta aerea dinamizzata del Foro Romano* (Dynamic Aerial View of the Roman Forum), 1930.

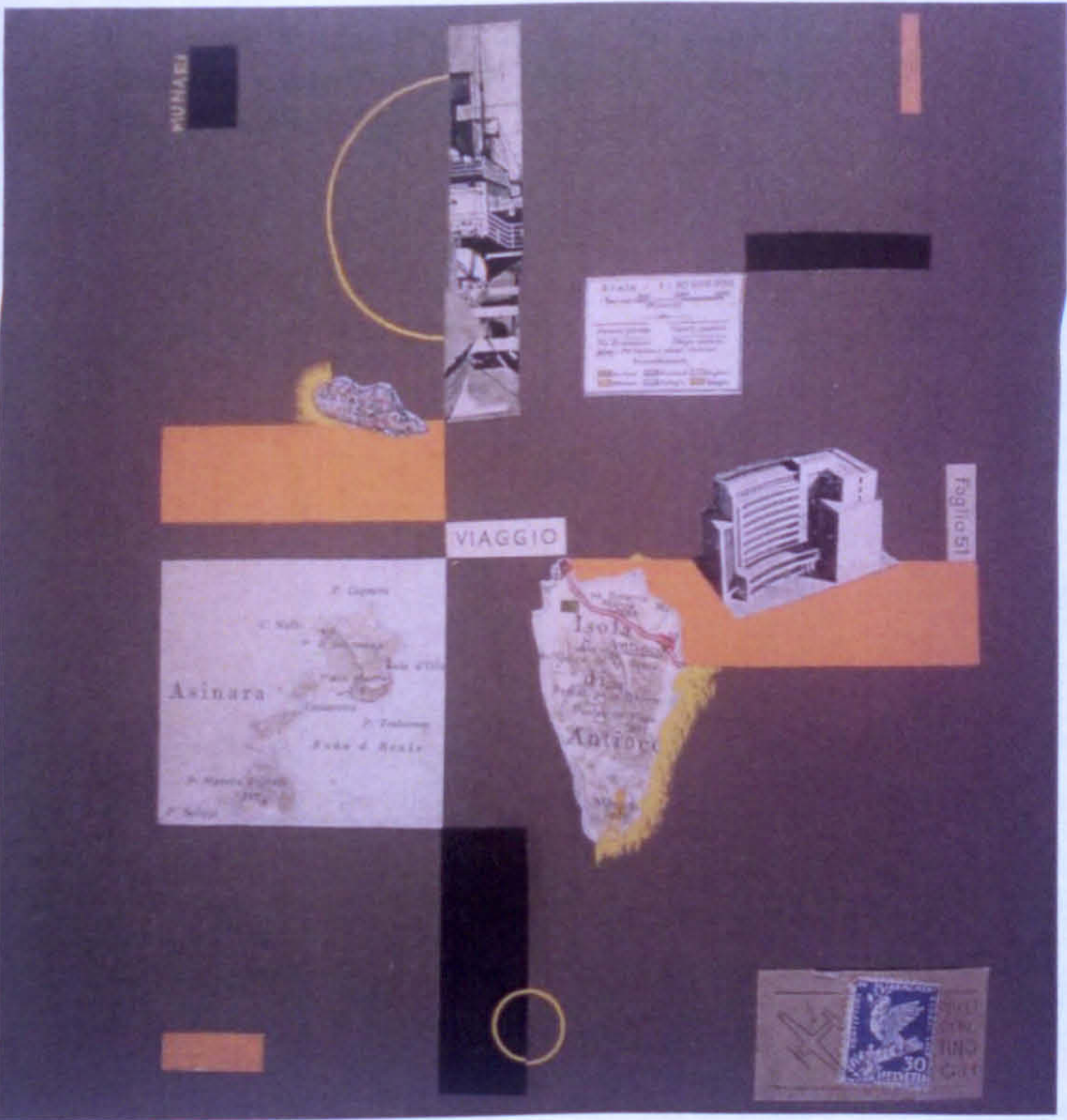


Figure 9 Bruno Munari, *Viaggio* (Travel), 1933, MART, Rovereto.



Figure 10 Nicolaj Diulgheroff, *Il bel Canavese* (The Beautiful Canavese), 1930. Massimo & Sonia Cirulli Archive, New York.



Figure 11 Umberto di Lazzaro, *Crociera aerea transatlantica* (Transatlantic Aerial Cruise), 1931. Massimo & Sonia Cirulli Archive, New York.



Figure 12 Cesare Andreoni, *Volo romantico* (Romantic Flight), 1932. Location unknown.



Figure 13 Tato, *Diavolerie di eliche* (Devilmements of Propellers), 1936. Private collection.



Figure 14 Tato, *Me ne frego e vado su* (I Don't Care and I'm Going Up), 1936. Private collection.



Figure 15 Tato, *Paesaggio aereo* (Aerial Landscape), 1932. Private collection.



Figure 16 Mario Molinari, *Il golfo di Hammamet. Liricismo topografico* (The Gulf of Hammamet. Topographical Lyricism), 1938. Private collection.



Figure 17 Mino delle Site, *Navigazione ascensionale* (Upward Navigation), 1933. Private collection.



Figure 18 Mino delle Site, *Velocità* (Speed), 1936. Private collection.



Figure 19 Pippo Oriani, *La conquista dello spazio* (The Conquest of Space), 1932. Location unknown.

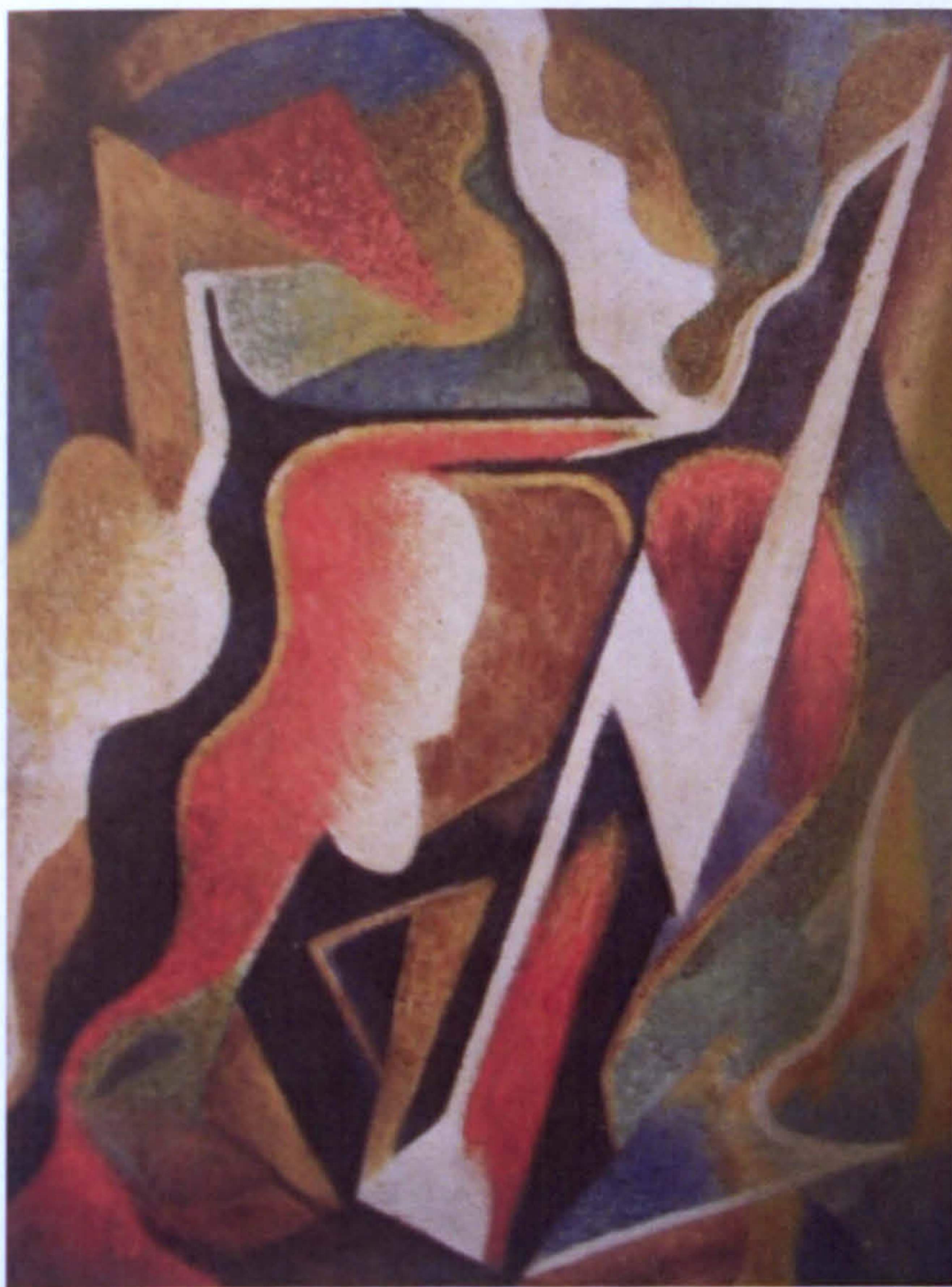


Figure 20 Augusto Ciacelli, *Conquista spaziale* (Spatial Conquest), 1933. Private collection.



Figure 21 Pippo Oriani, *Conquiste siderali* (Sidereal Conquests), 1931. Private collection.

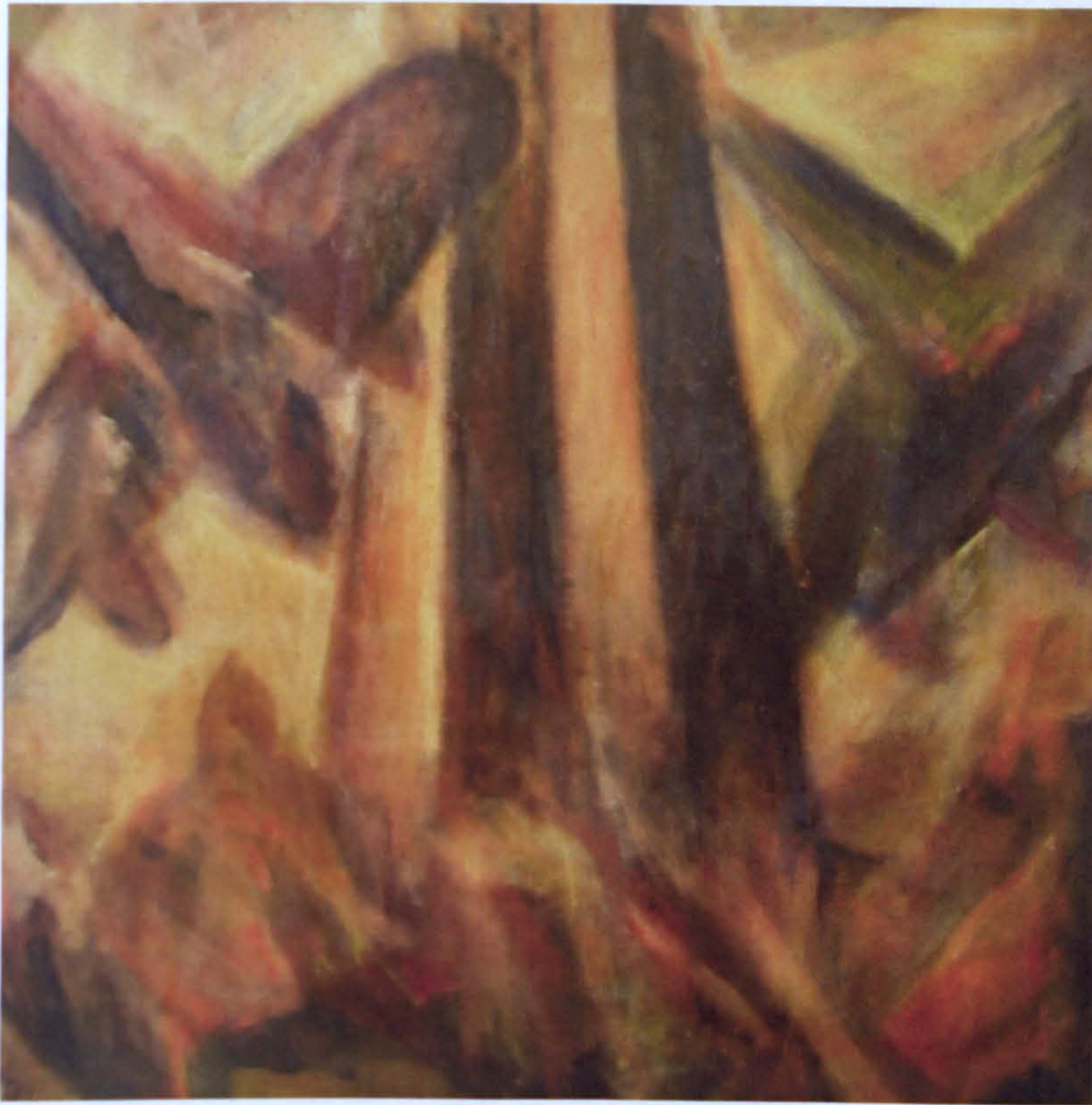


Figure 22 Angelo Caviglioni, *Aerei sulla città* (Aeroplanes over the City), 1929. Collection of Santuario della Beata Vergine del Soccorso, Bologna.



Figure 23 Sante Monachesi, *Acrobazie aeree* (Aerial Acrobatics), c.1930. Private collection, Rome.



Figure 24 Sante Monachesi, *Aeropittura con fabbrica* (Aeropittura with Factory), c.1930. Private collection, Rome.

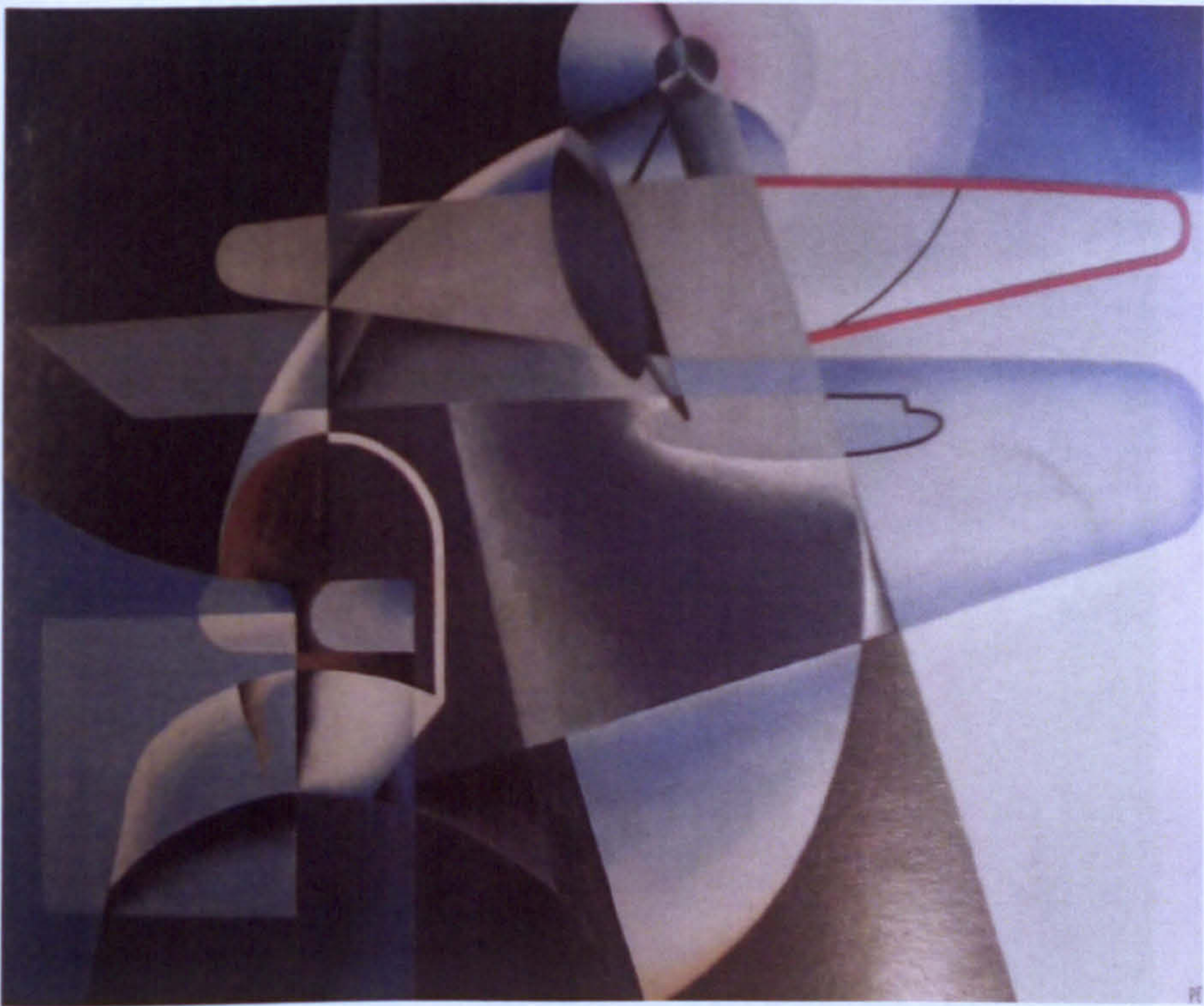


Figure 25 Osvaldo Peruzzi, *Aeropittura*, 1934. Galleria Comunale di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome.



Figure 26 Mino delle Site, *Rombo di motori* (Roar of the Engines), 1932. Collection eredi delle Site, Rome.



Figure 27 Gerardo Dottori, *Aeropaesaggio* (Aero-landscape), 1932. Private collection.



Figure 28 Gerardo Dottori, *Aurora volando* (Dawn in Flight), 1933. Galleria Arte Centro, Milan.



Figure 29 Alessandro Bruschetti, *Il fulmine* (Lightning), 1932. Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna.



Figure 30 Alessandro Bruschetti, *Colline e nubi* (Hills and Clouds), 1932. Comune di Perugia.



Figure 31 Marisa Mori, *Ballata aerea nella notte* (Aerial Ballad in the Night), 1932. Private collection, Rome.

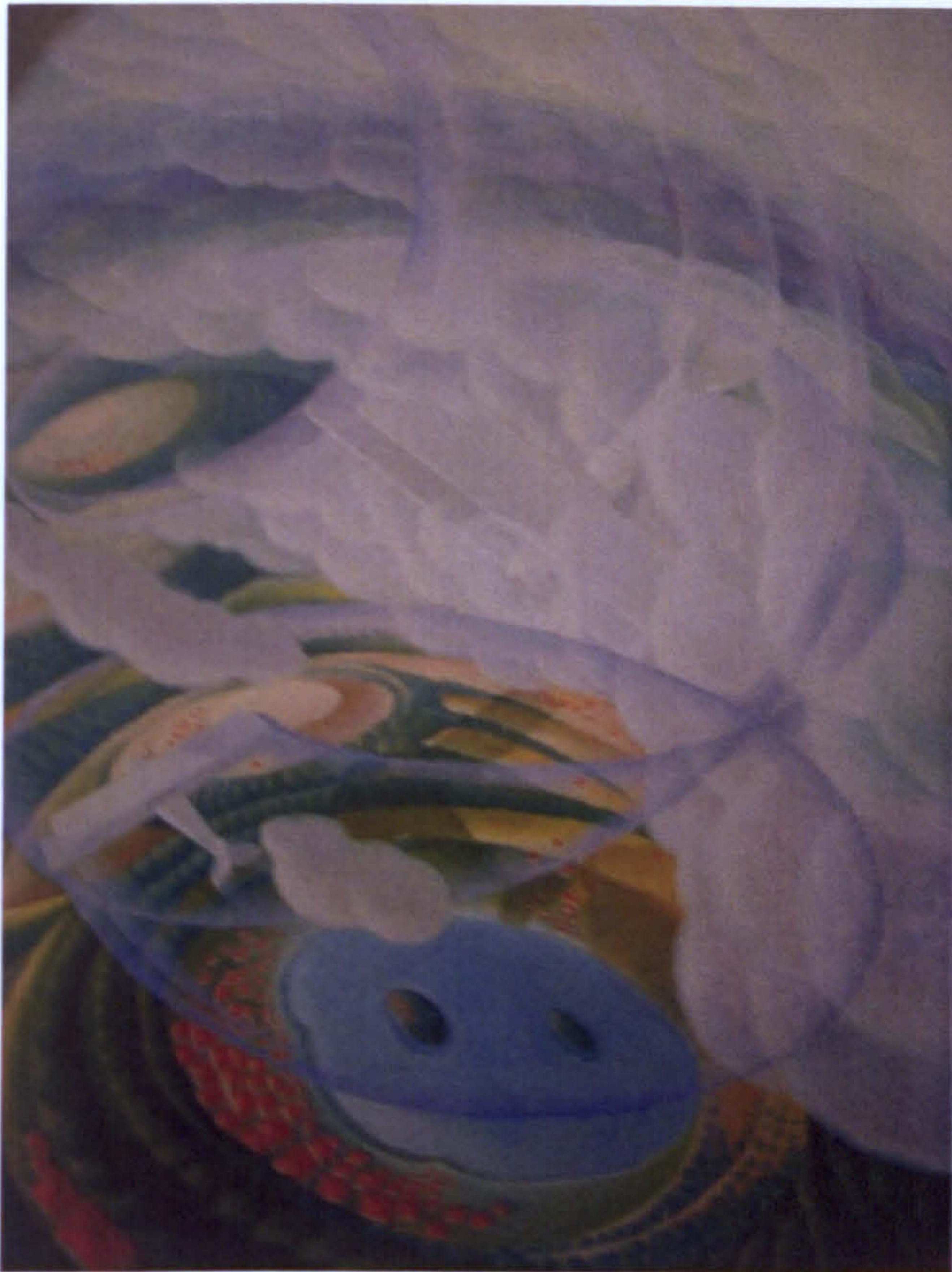


Figure 32 Alessandro Bruschetti, *Acrobazia fra le nuvole* (Acrobatics in the Clouds), 1934. Camera di Commercio Industria Artigianato, Perugia.



Figure 33 Tullio Crali, *Vite Orizzontale (Roll)*, 1938. Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome.



Figure 34 Mino delle Site, *Paradiso perduto* (Lost Paradise), 1932. Archive Mino delle Site, Rome.



Figure 35 Benedetta, *Aeropittura di un incontro con l'isola* (Aeropainting of an Encounter with the Island), 1939. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome.



Figure 36 Bruno Tano, *Oasi* (Oasis), 1935. Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio della Provincia di Macerata.



Figure 37 Benedetta, *Cime arse di solitudine* (Summits Parched of Solitude), c.1936. Museo Caproni, Trento.



Figure 38 Fillia, *Spiritualità dell'aviatore* (Spirituality of the Aviator), 1929. Private collection, Rome.



Figure 39 Mino delle Site, *Il cuore del pilota* (The Heart of the Pilot), 1933. Private collection.



Figure 40 Regina (Cassolo Bracchi), *L'amante dell'aviatore* (Aviator's Mistress), 1936. Museo Regina, Comune di Mede, Pavia.



Figure 41 Fillia, *Femminilità* (Femininity), 1928. Location unknown.

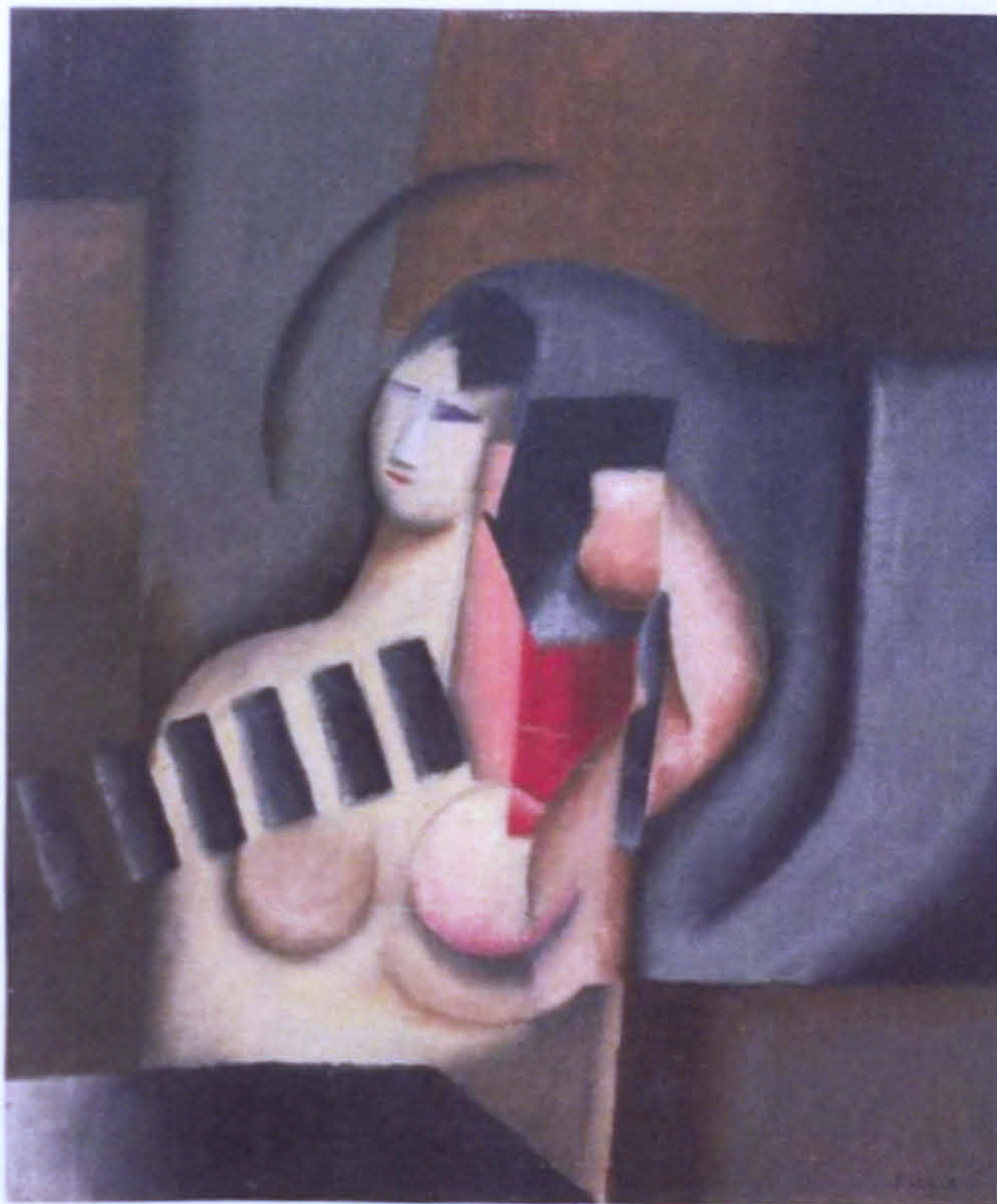


Figure 42 Fillia, *Suonatrice* (Musician), 1928. Private collection.

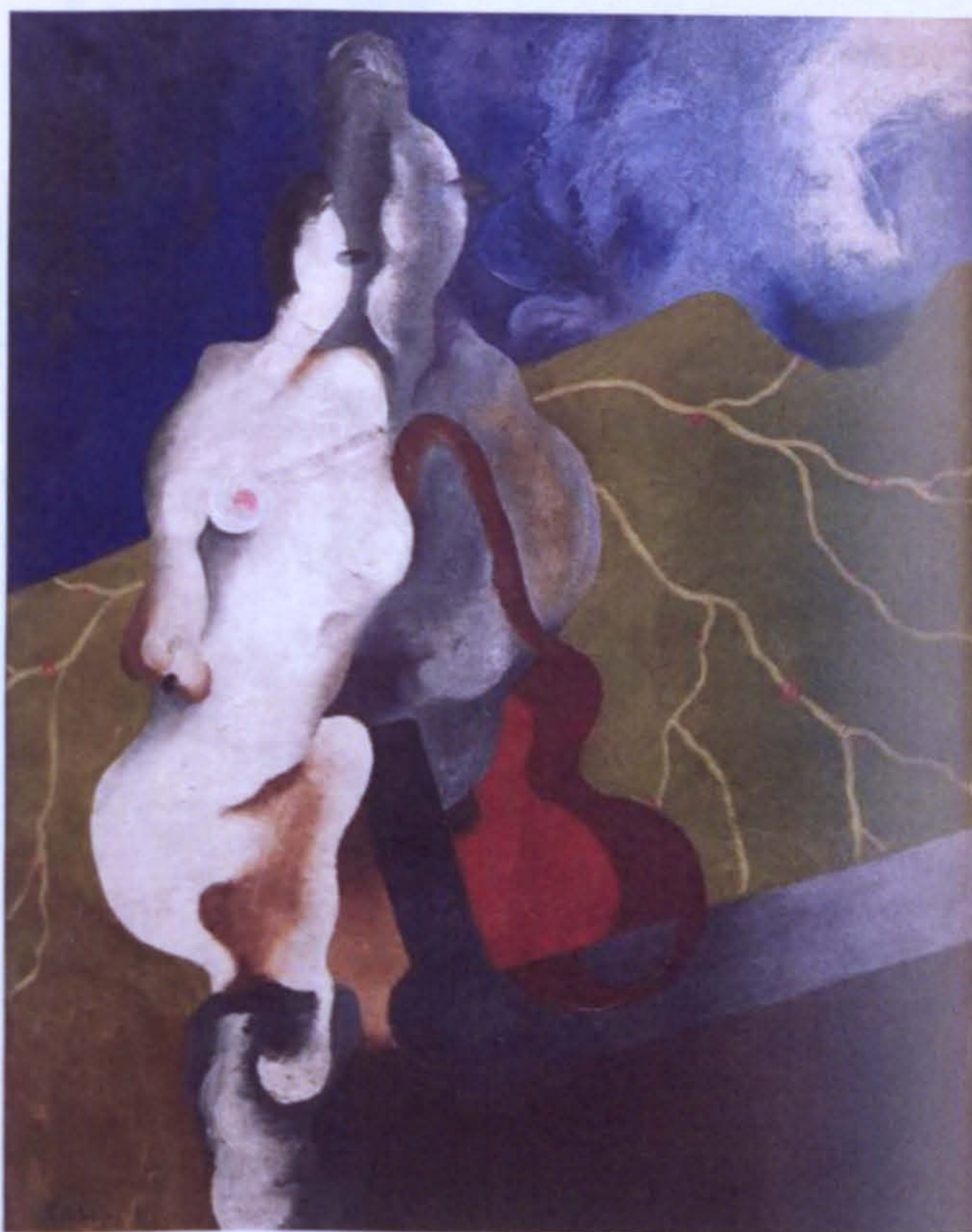


Figure 43 Fillia, *Tendenze spirituali* (Spiritual Tendencies), 1929. Private collection.



Figure 44 Enrico Prampolini, *Ritratto di Benedetta Marinetti* (Portrait of Benedetta Marinetti), 1928-29. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome.



Figure 45 Enrico Prampolini, *Sintesi di paese* (Synthesis of a Town), 1936. Location unknown.



Figure 46 Renato di Bosso, *Aerovisione sintetica e simultanea del Lago di Garda* (Synthetic and Simultaneous Aeroview of the Lake Garda), 1934. Galleria Nazionale di Arte Moderna, Rome.



Figure 47 Fillia, *Più pesante dell'aria* (Heavier than Air), 1933-1934. Galleria Gaudenzi, Genoa.



Figure 48 Fillia, *La sacra famiglia* (The Holy Family), 1931. Collection Piera Gaudenzi, Genoa.



Figure 49 Fillia, *Mistero aereo* (The Aerial Mystery), c.1931. Private collection.



Figure 50 Pippo Oriani, *Nascita della simultaneità* (Birth of Simultaneity), 1932. Private collection.



Figure 51 Pippo Oriani, *Sintesi della sensibilità meccanica* (Synthesis of the Mechanical Sensibility), 1930. Private collection.



Figure 52 Benedetta, *Sintesi delle comunicazioni radiofoniche* (Synthesis of radio communications), 1933-34. Palazzo delle Poste, Palermo

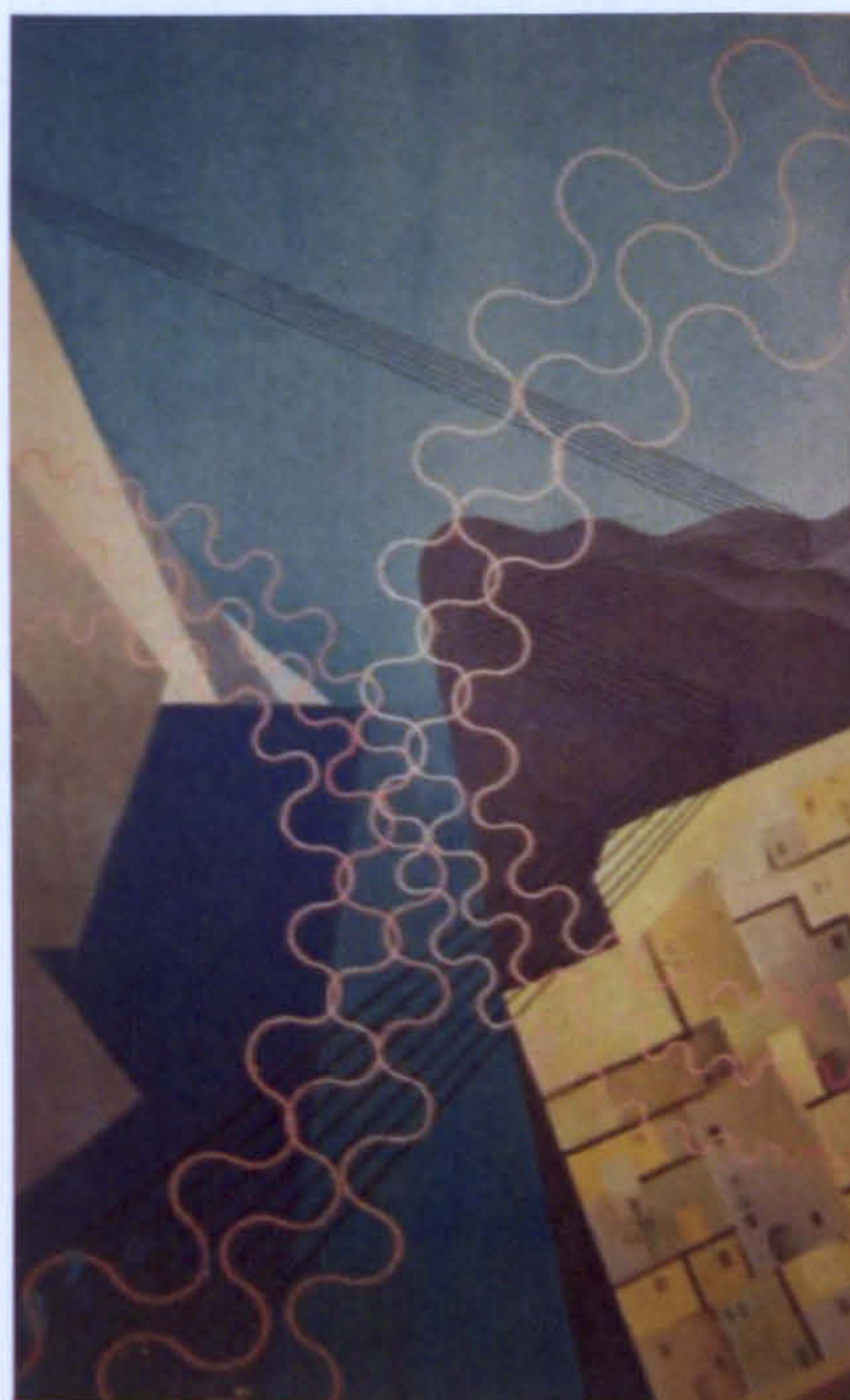


Figure 53 *Sintesi delle Comunicazioni telegrafiche e telefoniche* (Synthesis of the Telegraph and Telephone Communications), 1933-34. Palazzo delle Poste, Palermo.

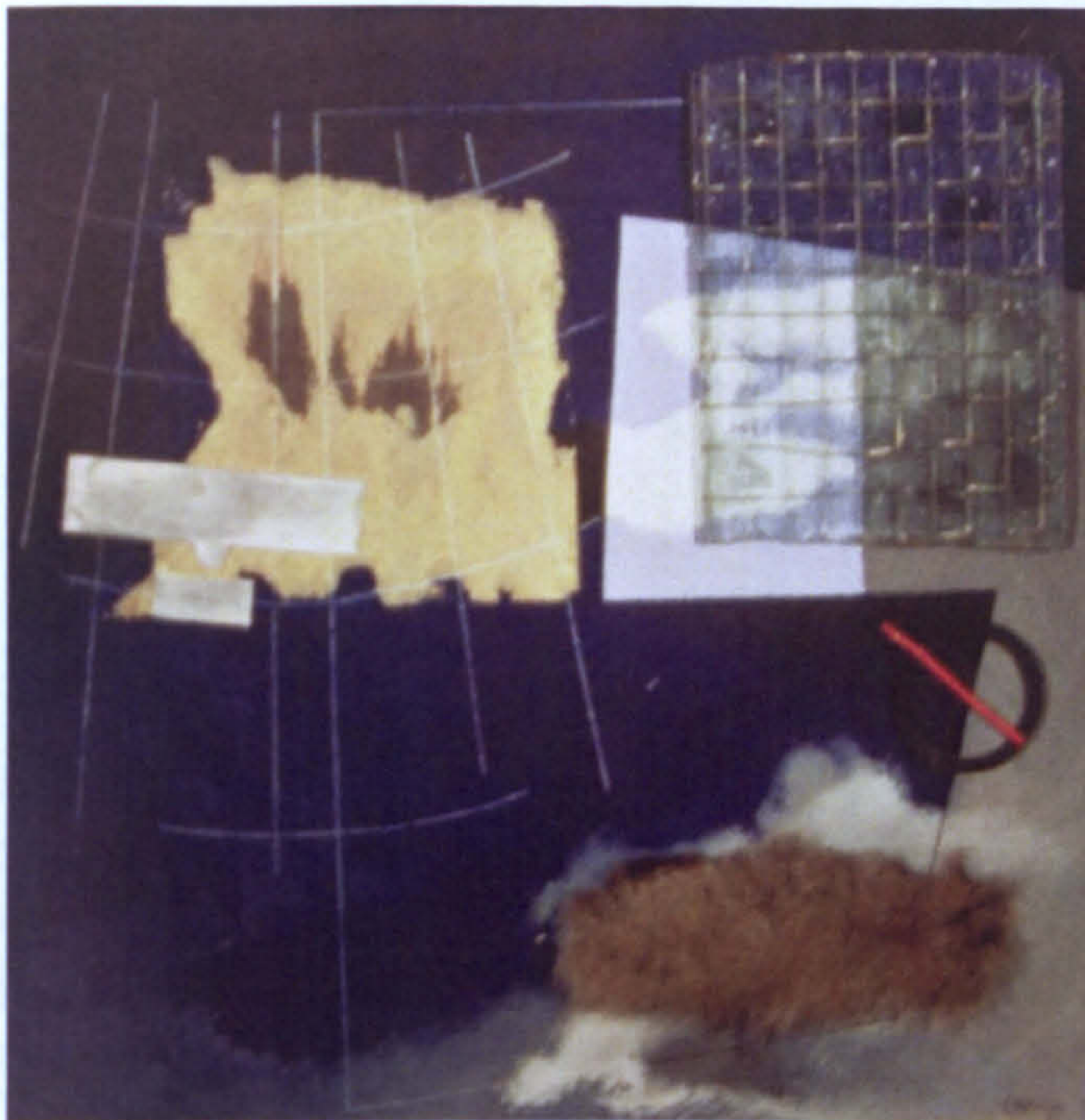


Figure 54 Tullio Crali, *La conquista dello spazio. Intervista con il cielo* (The Conquest of Space. Interview with the Sky), 1931. MART, Rovereto.

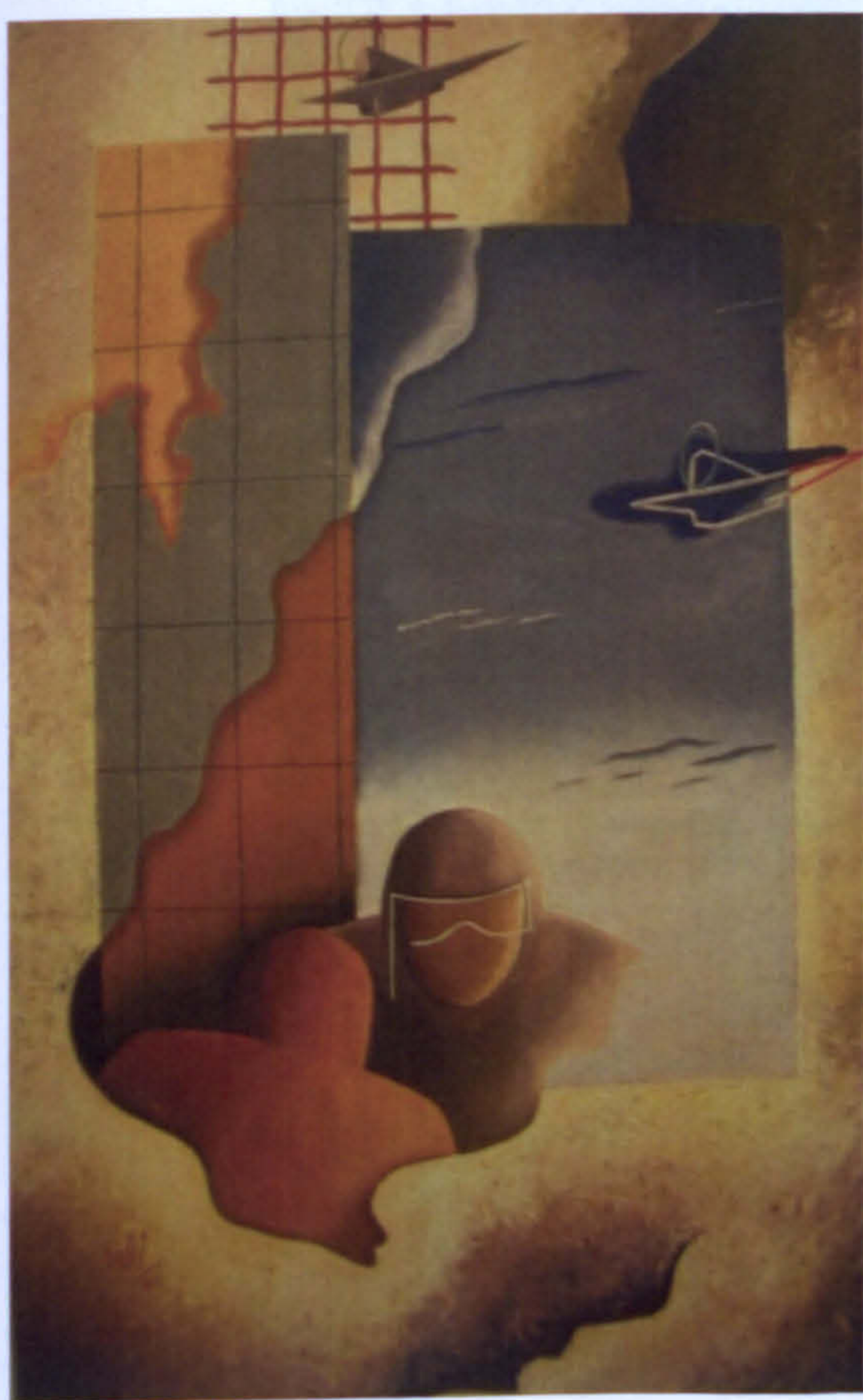


Figure 55 Domenico Belli, *Passeggiata nello spazio* (A Walk in Space), 1935. Private collection.



Figure 56 Cesare Andreoni, *Bozzetto navi-aereo* (Sketch Boats-Aeroplanes), 1933-34. Location unknown.



Figure 57 Enrico Prampolini, *Sezione d'oro-paesaggio di un'attrice* (Section Gold-Landscape of an Actress), 1930. Private collection.



Figure 58 Enrico Prampolini, *Metamorfosi cosmica* (Cosmic Metamorphosis), 1935. Private collection.

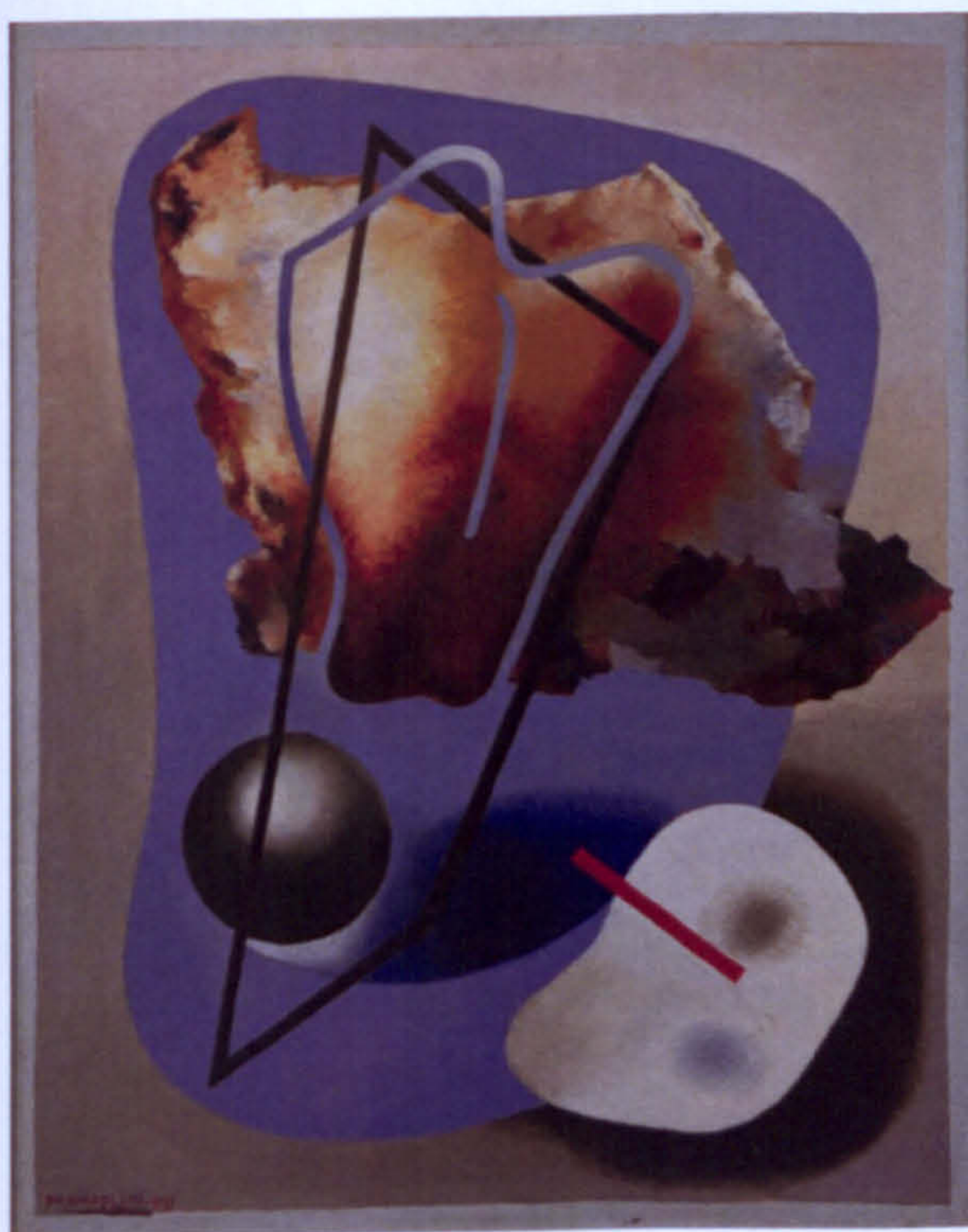


Figure 59 Enrico Prampolini, *Forme forze nello spazio* (Forms Forces in Space), 1932. Private collection.



Figure 60 Elia Vottero, *Aeropittura-disgregazione* (Aeropittura-Disintegration), 1932. Private collection. Rome.

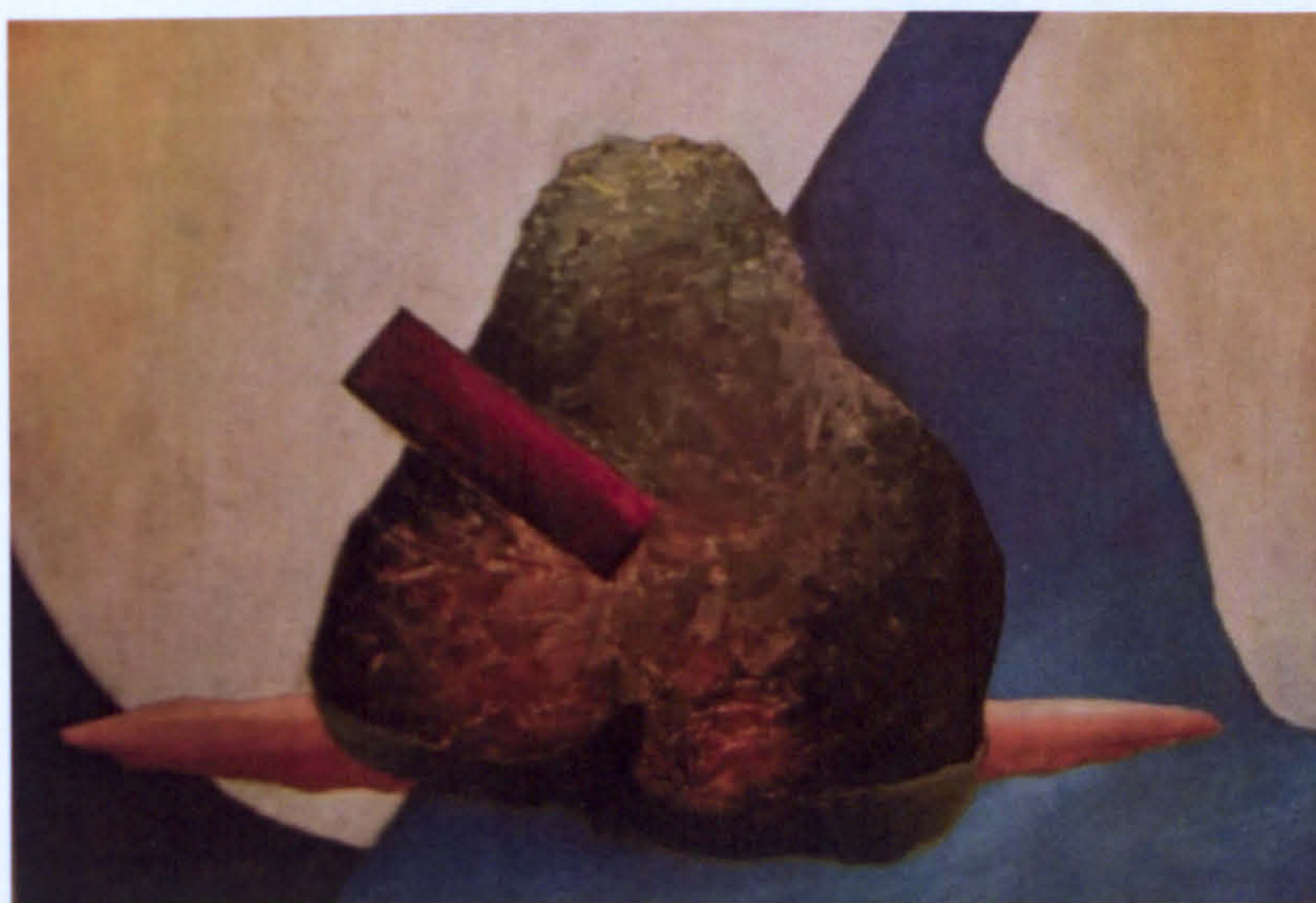


Figure 61 Fillia, *Aeropittura*, 1931. Collection Giulio Gonnet, Turin.



Figure 62 Fillia, *Composizione plastica* (Plastic Composition), 1931. Private collection.



Figure 63 Fillia, *Paesaggio* (Landscape), 1932. Private collection.



Figure 64 Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, 1936, Como.

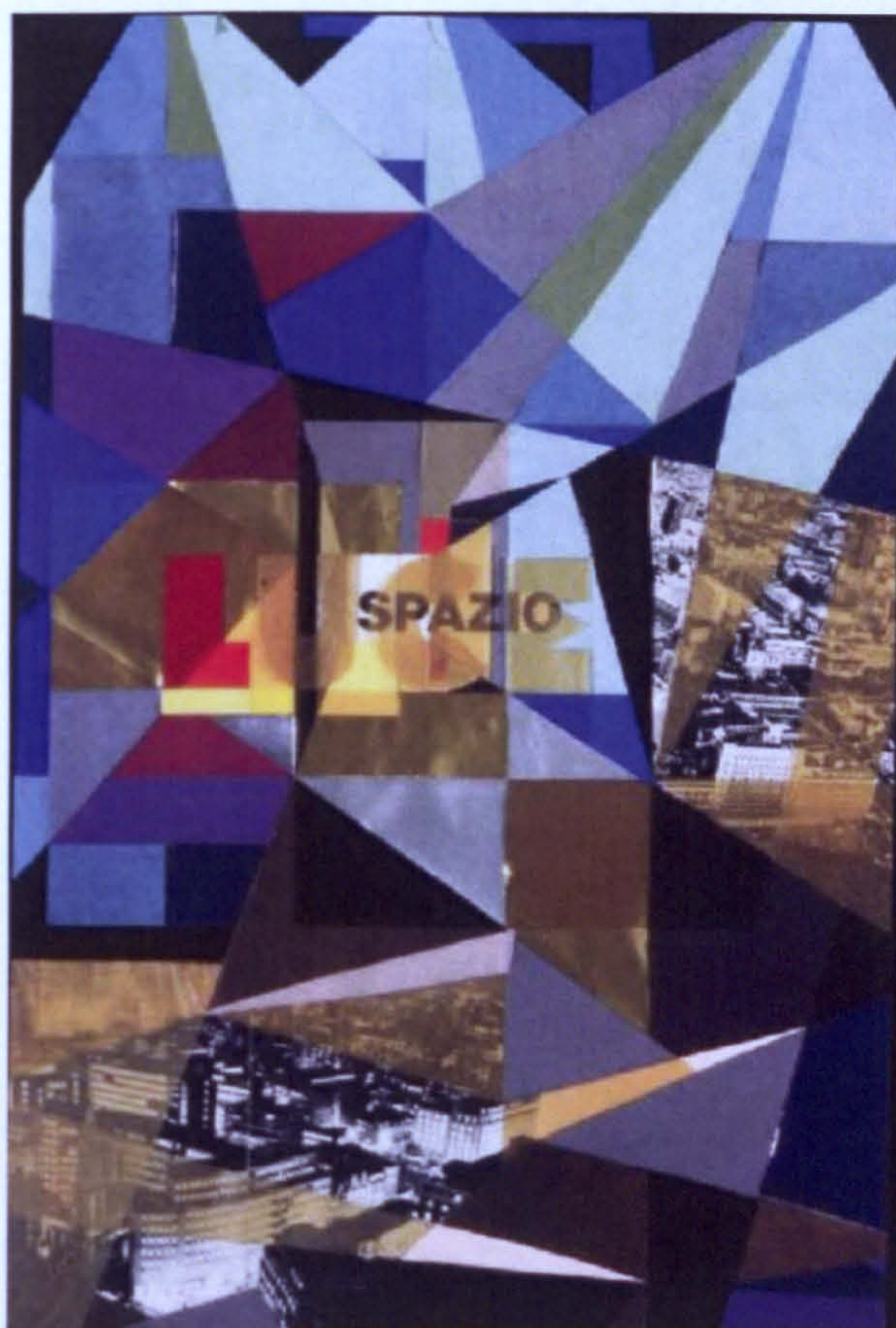


Figure 65 Nicolaj Diulgheroff, *Luce-Spazio* (Light-Space), c.1930. MART, Rovereto.



Figure 66 Tullio Crali, *Incuneandosi nell'abitato* (Nose Diving on the City), 1939. MART, Rovereto.

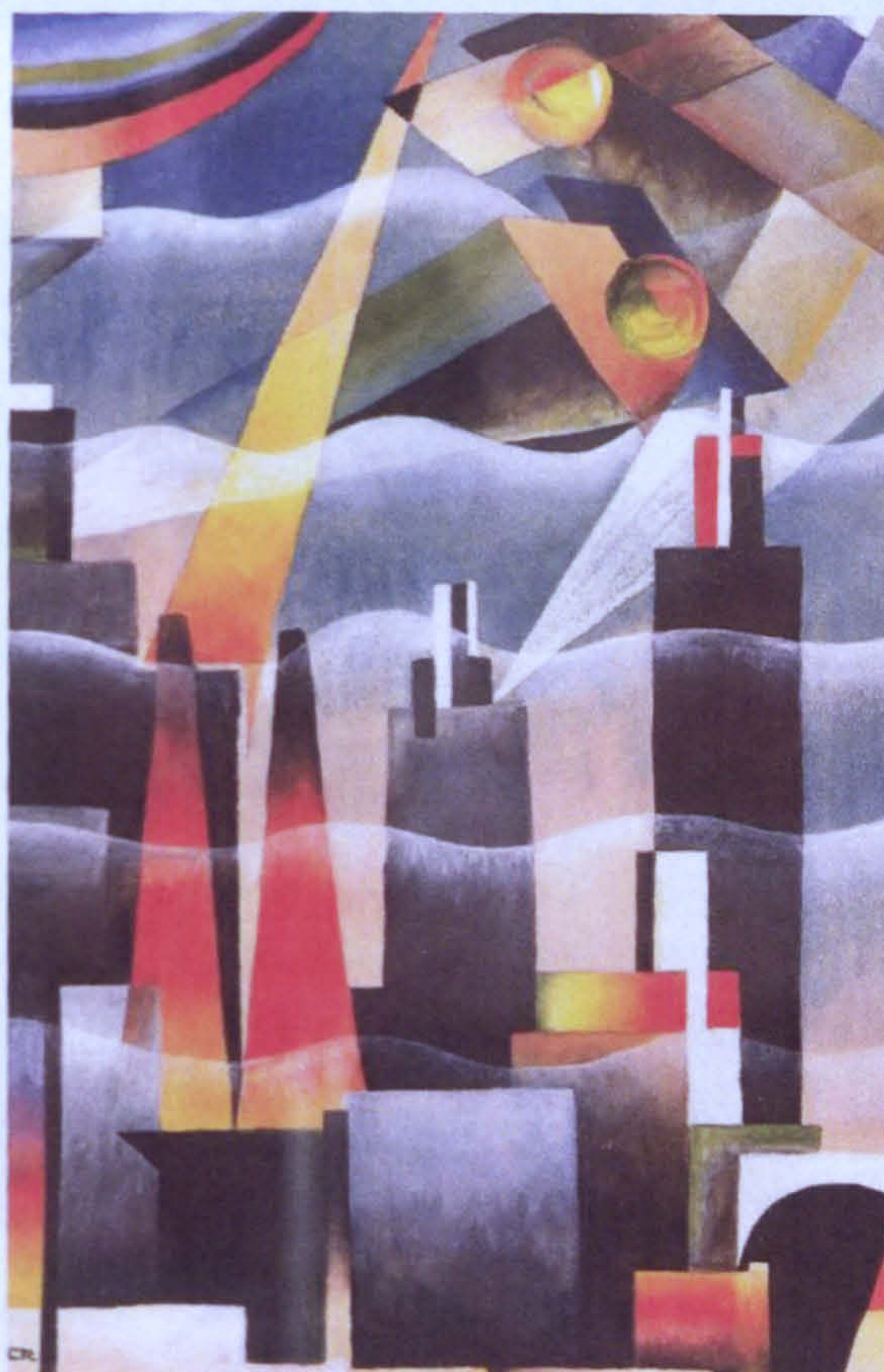


Figure 67 Tullio Crali, *Aeroplani sulla metropoli* (Aeroplanes on the Metropolis), 1926. Location unknown.



Figure 68 Tullio Crali, *Caproncino in decollo* (Caproncino Taking Off), 1932. Location unknown.

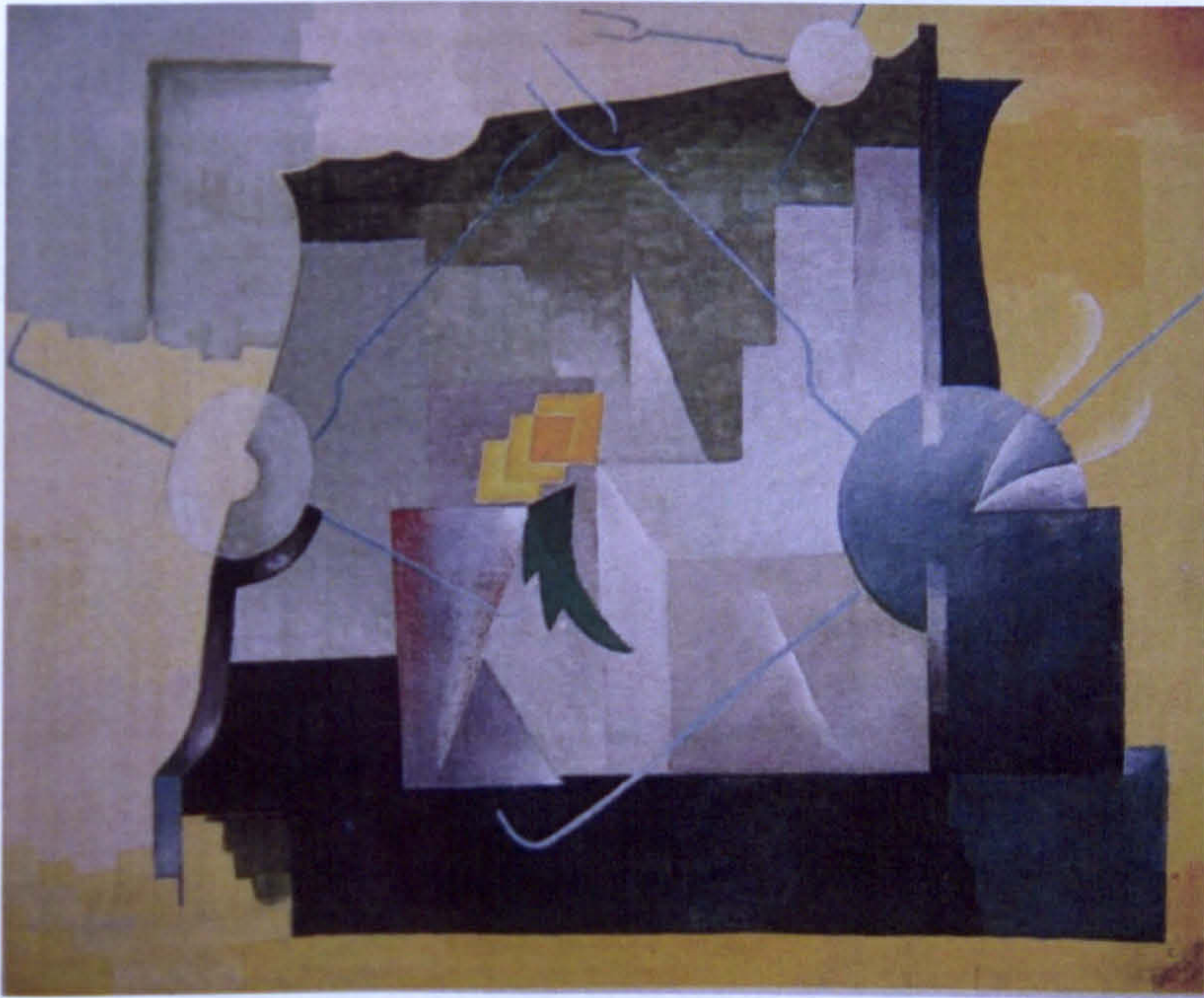


Figure 69 Cesare Andreoni, *Paesaggio aereo* (Aerial Landscape), 1932. Location unknown.



Figure 70 Fillia, *L'idolo del cielo* (The Idol of the Sky), 1932-34. Private collection.

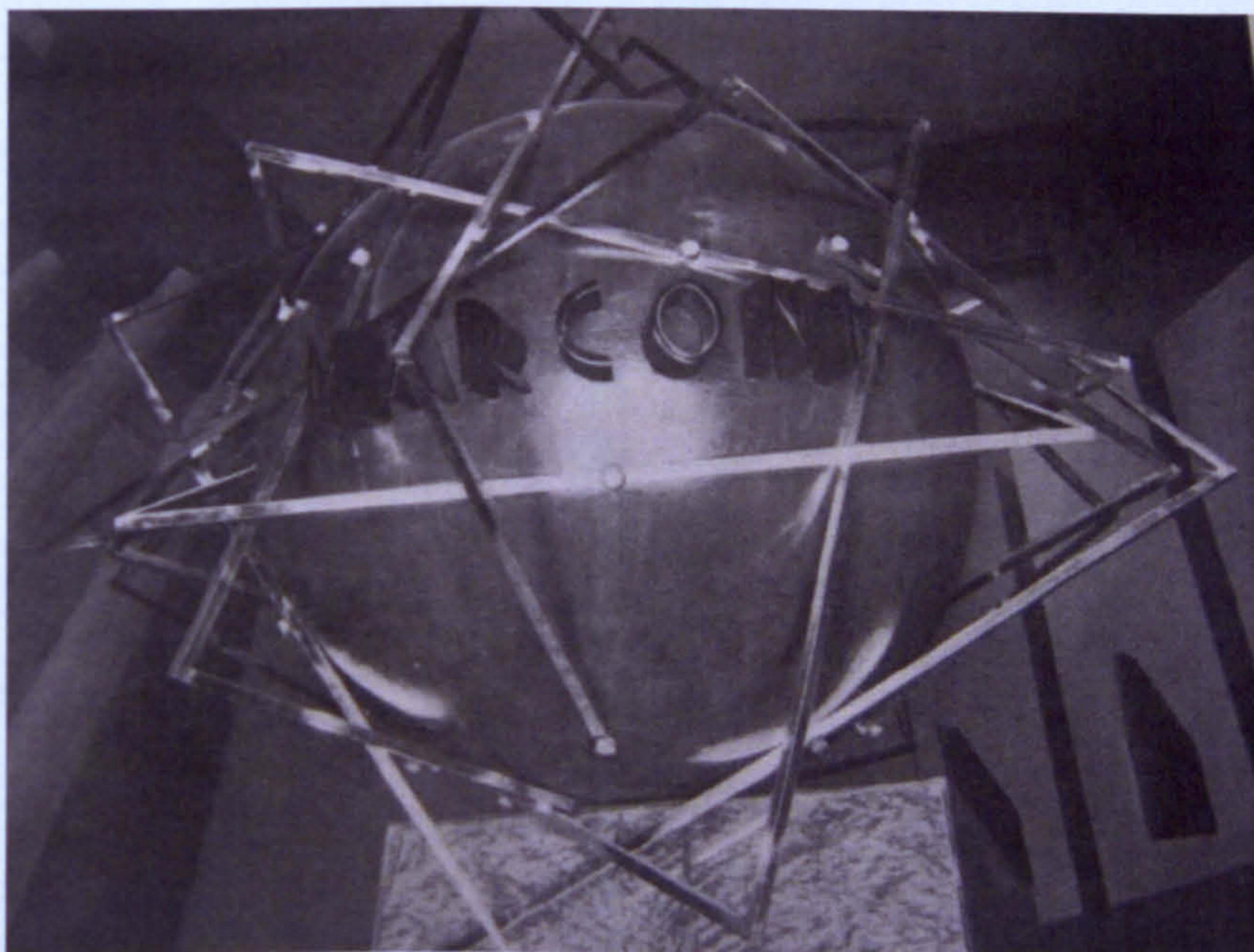


Figure 71 Enrico Prampolini, *Sculpture for the Exhibition of Fascist Revolution*, 1932.



Figure 72 Entrance of the *Mostra di plastica murale*, 1935, Genoa.

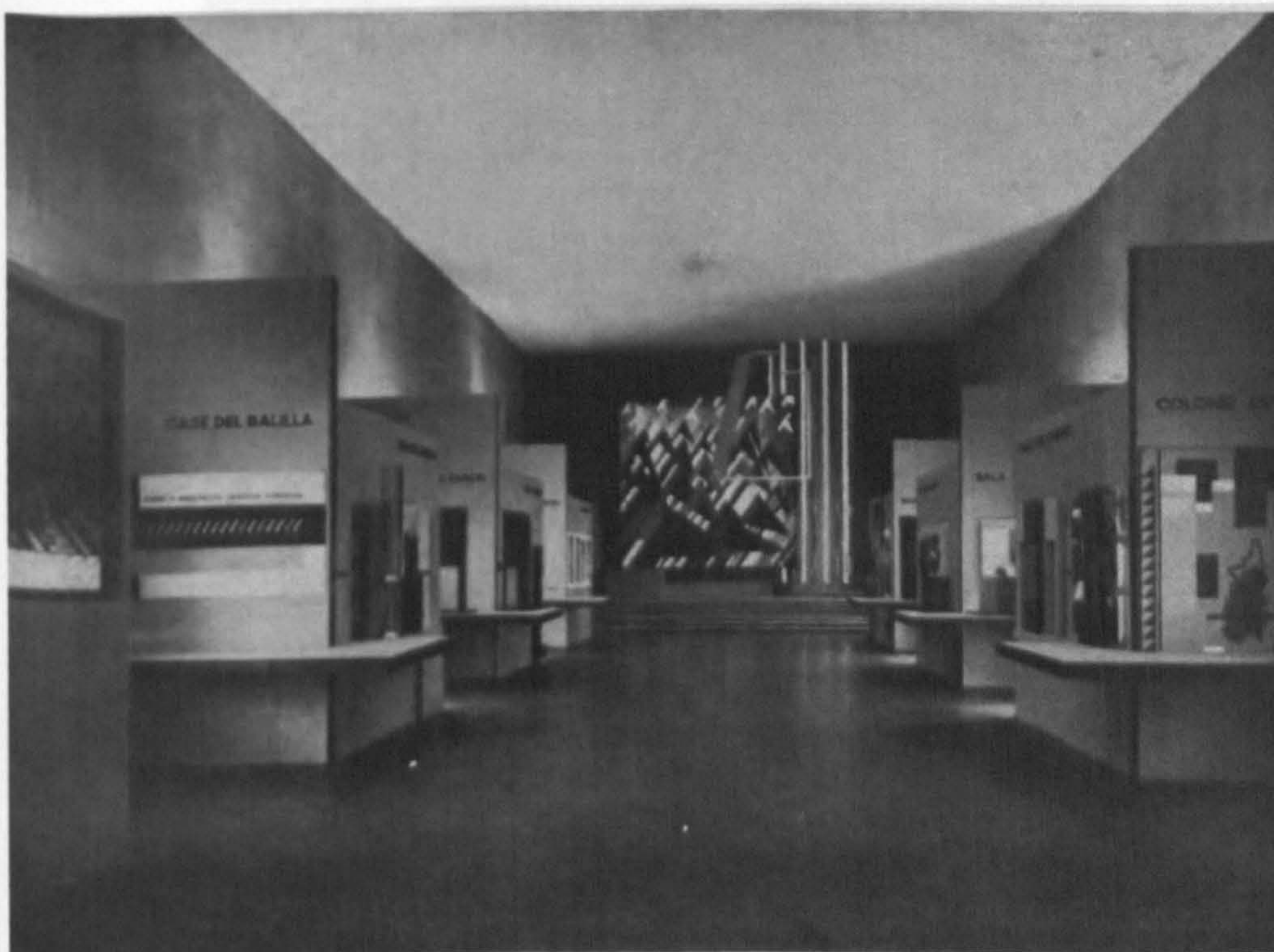


Figure 73 Exhibition hall at the *Mostra di plastica murale*, 1935, Genoa.

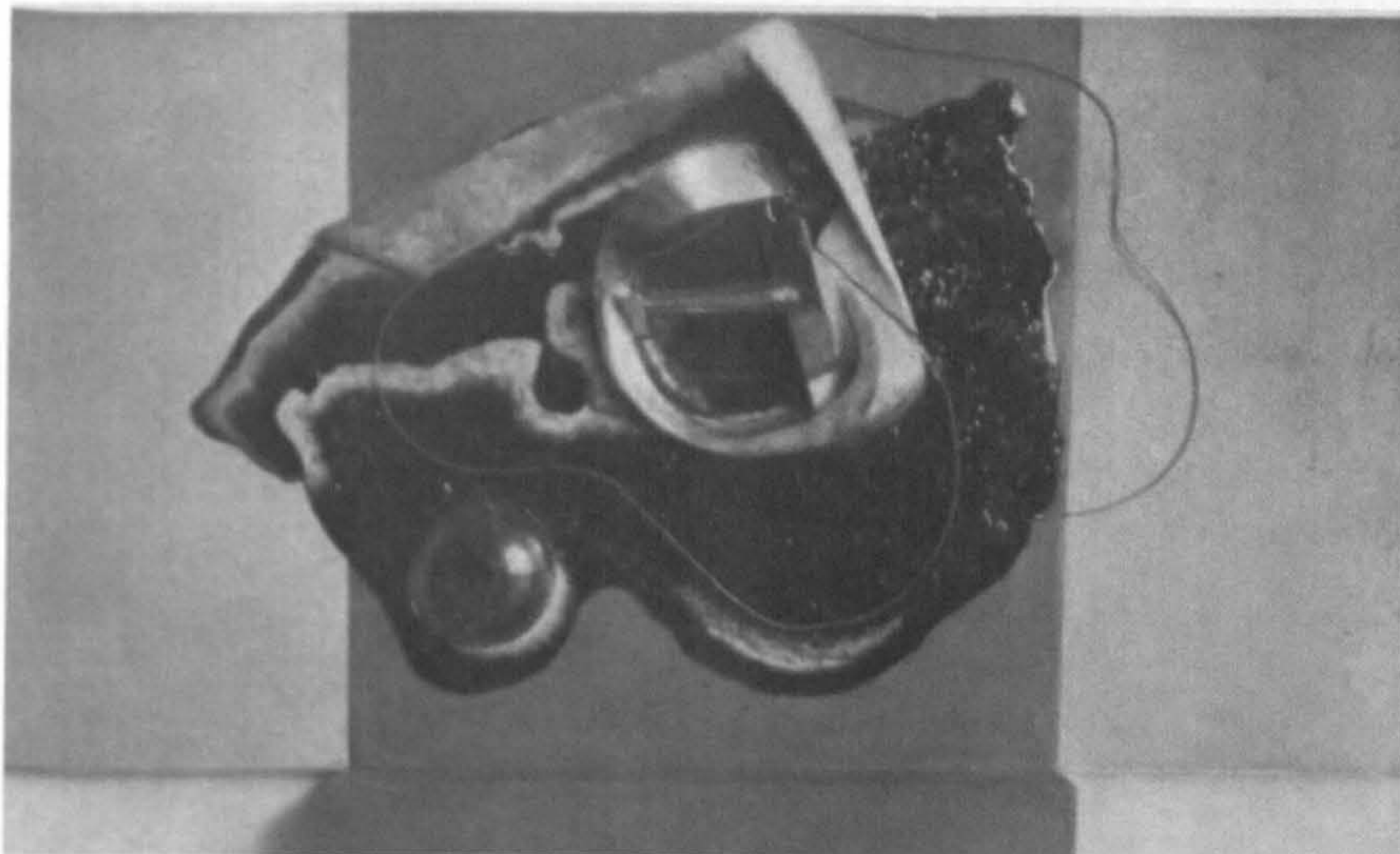


Figure 74 Fillia, Pippo Oriani and Mino Rosso, *La conquista dello spazio* (The Conquest of Space) at the *Mostra di plastica murale*, 1935, Genoa.

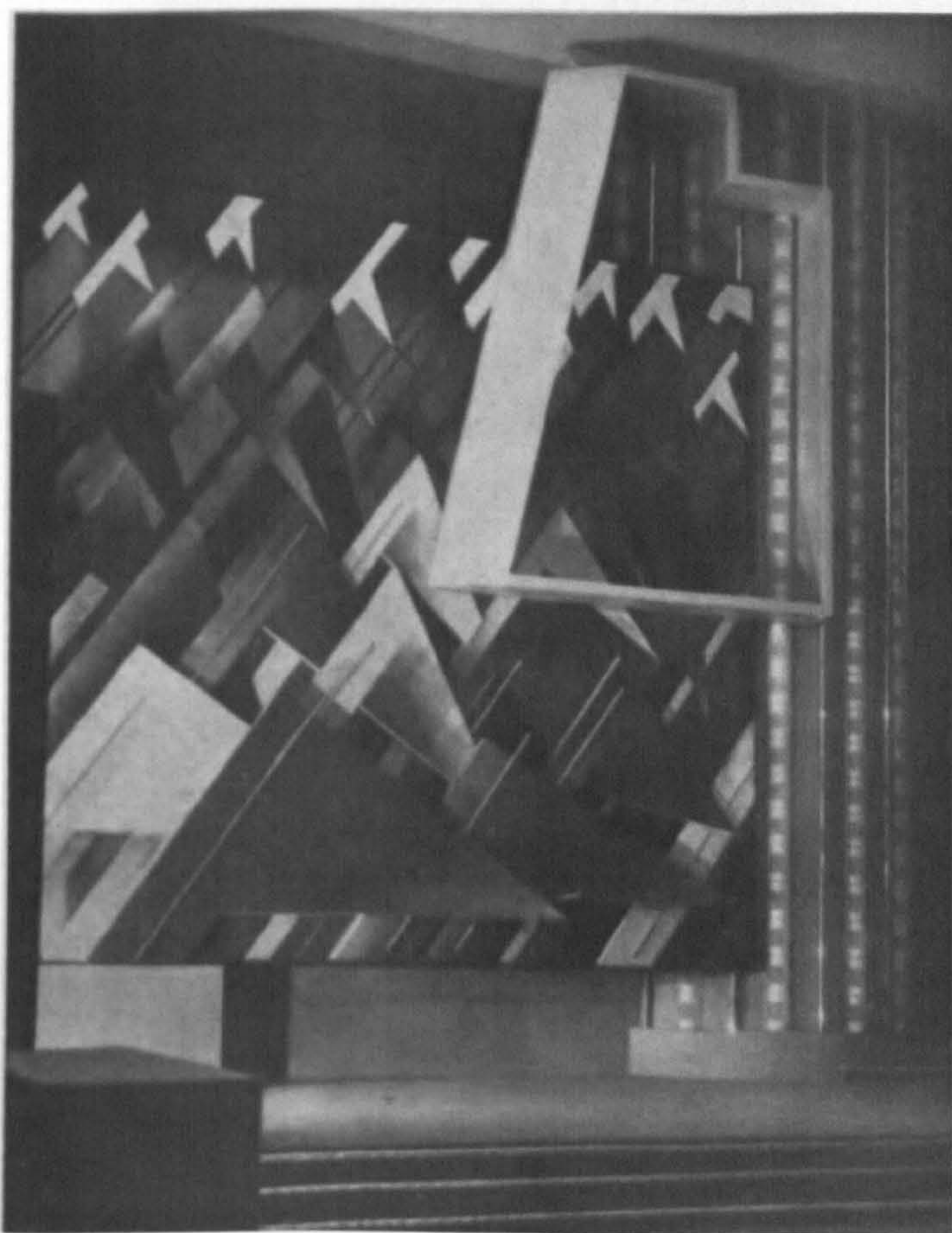


Figure 75 Enrico Prampolini, *Ritmi ascensionali delle forze Fasciste* (Ascensional Rhythms of the Fascist Forces) at the *Mostra di plastica murale*, 1935, Genoa.

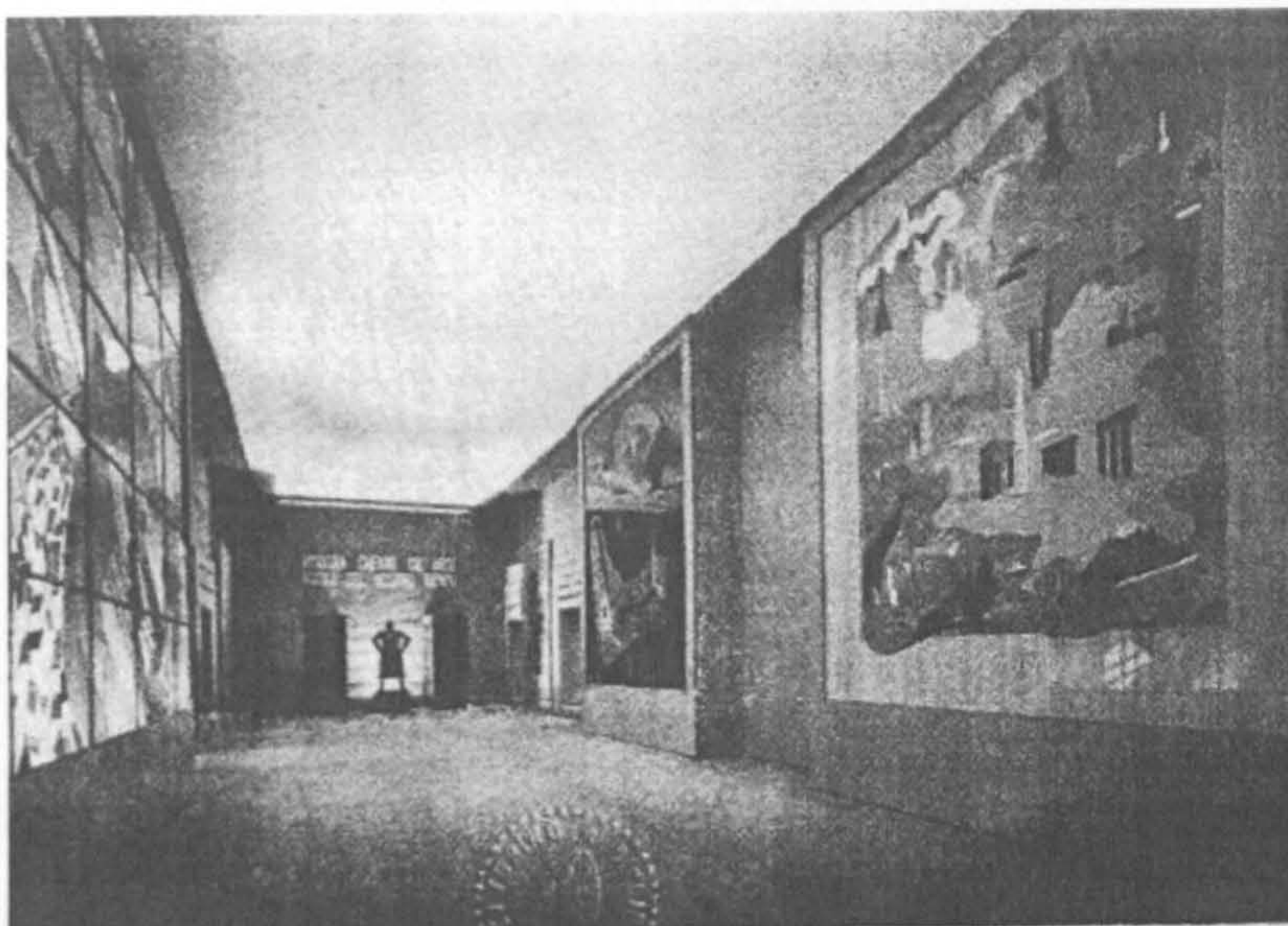


Figure 76 Central Hall at the *Mostra di plastica murale*, 1936, Rome.

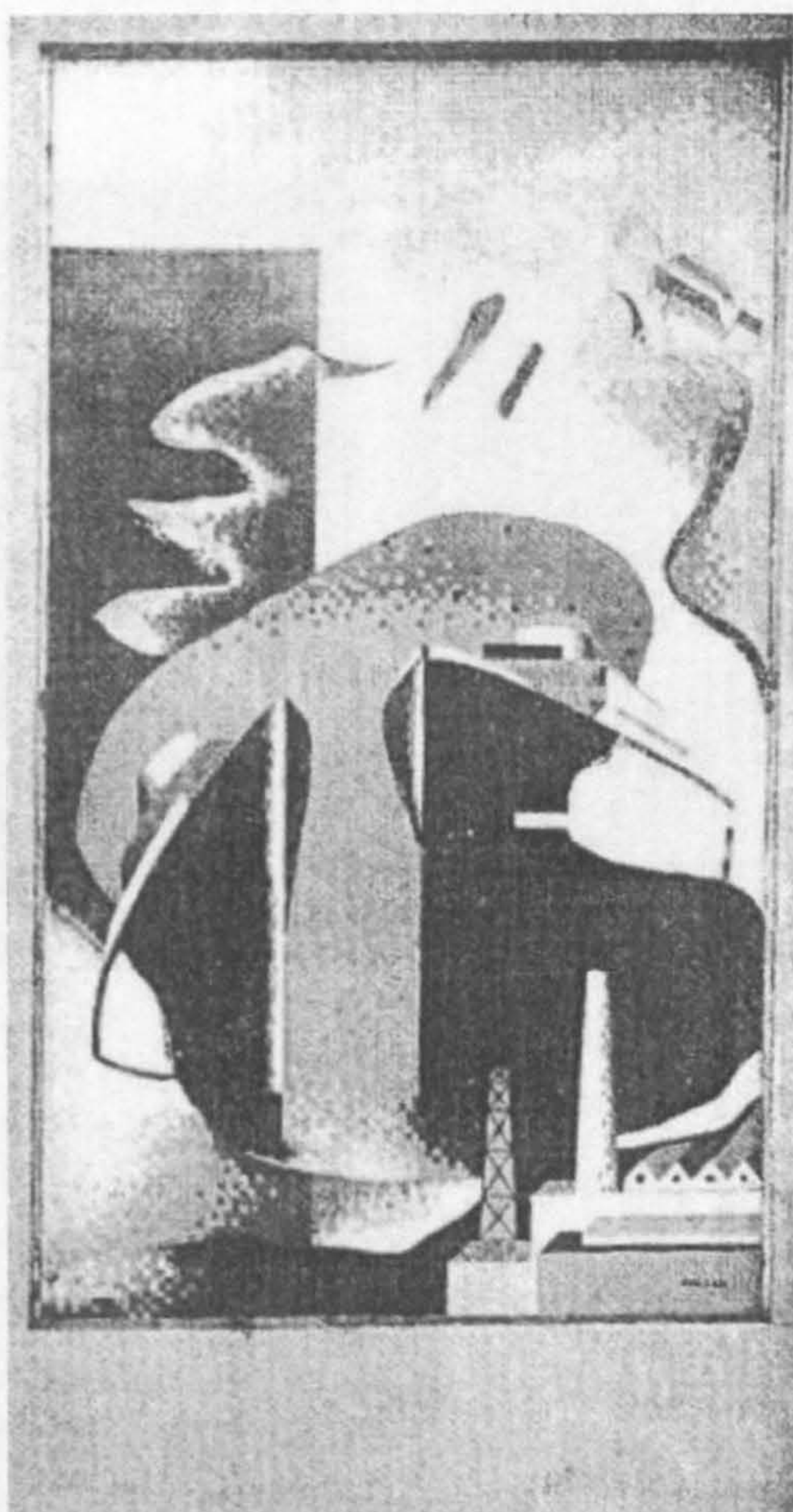


Figure 77 Fillia, *Trasporti Marittimi* (Maritime Transports) at the *Mostra di plastica murale*, 1936, Rome.



Figure 78 Fillia and Enrico Prampolini, *Comunicazioni* (Communications), 1933. Palazzo delle Poste, La Spezia.

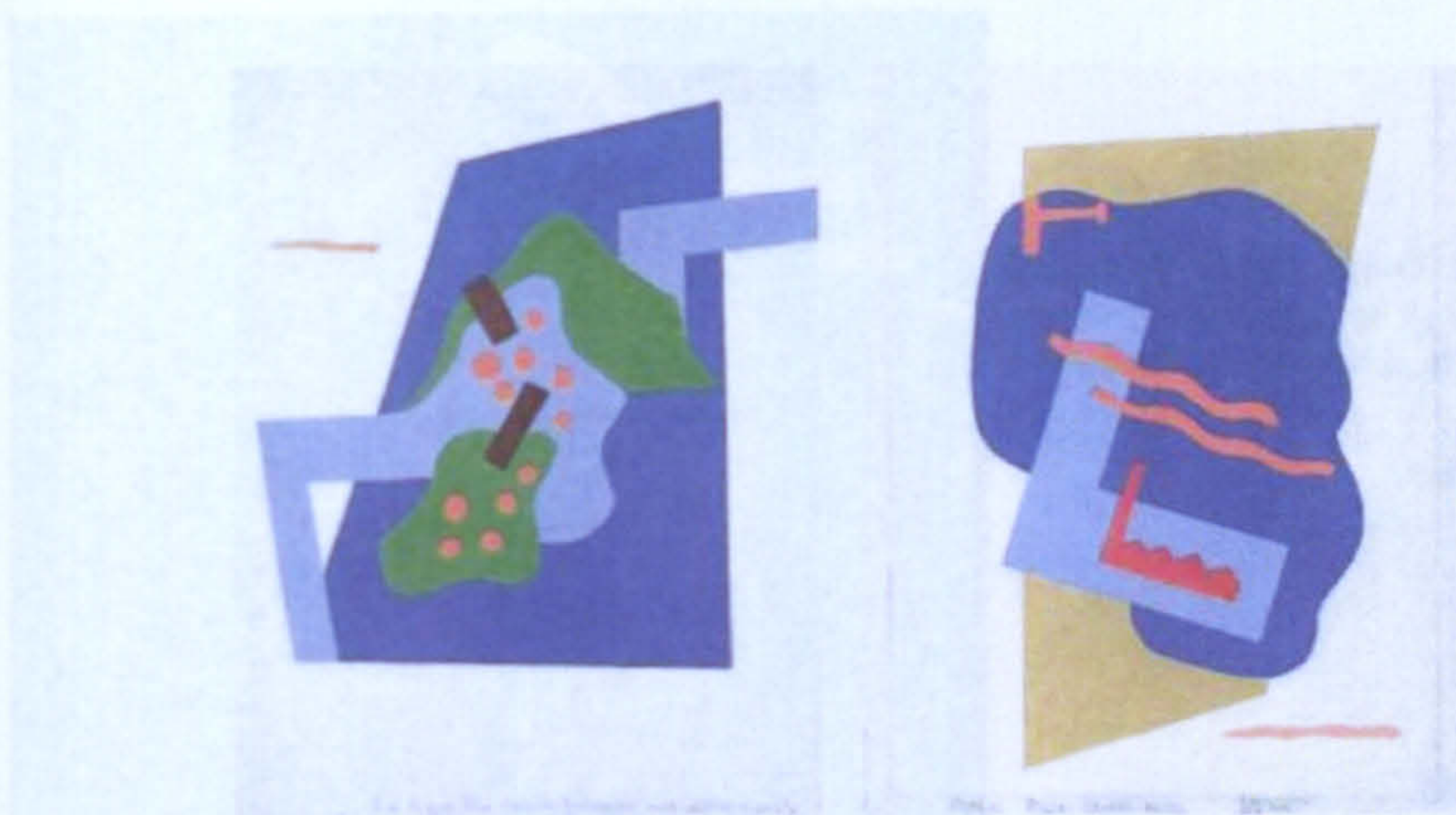


Figure 79 Fillia, Pippo Oriani, Mino Rosso, Sketches for *plastica murale* for Casa Cervo (Biella), n.17 and n. 10, 1934. Istituto Alvar Aalto, Museo dell'Architettura, Arti Applicate e Design, Turin.



Figure 80 Fillia, *Natività* (Nativity), 1932-33. Galleria d'Arte il Vicolo, Genoa (current in 2007).



Figure 81 Pippo Oriani, *Divinizzazione dello spazio* (Deification of Space), 1931. Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin.

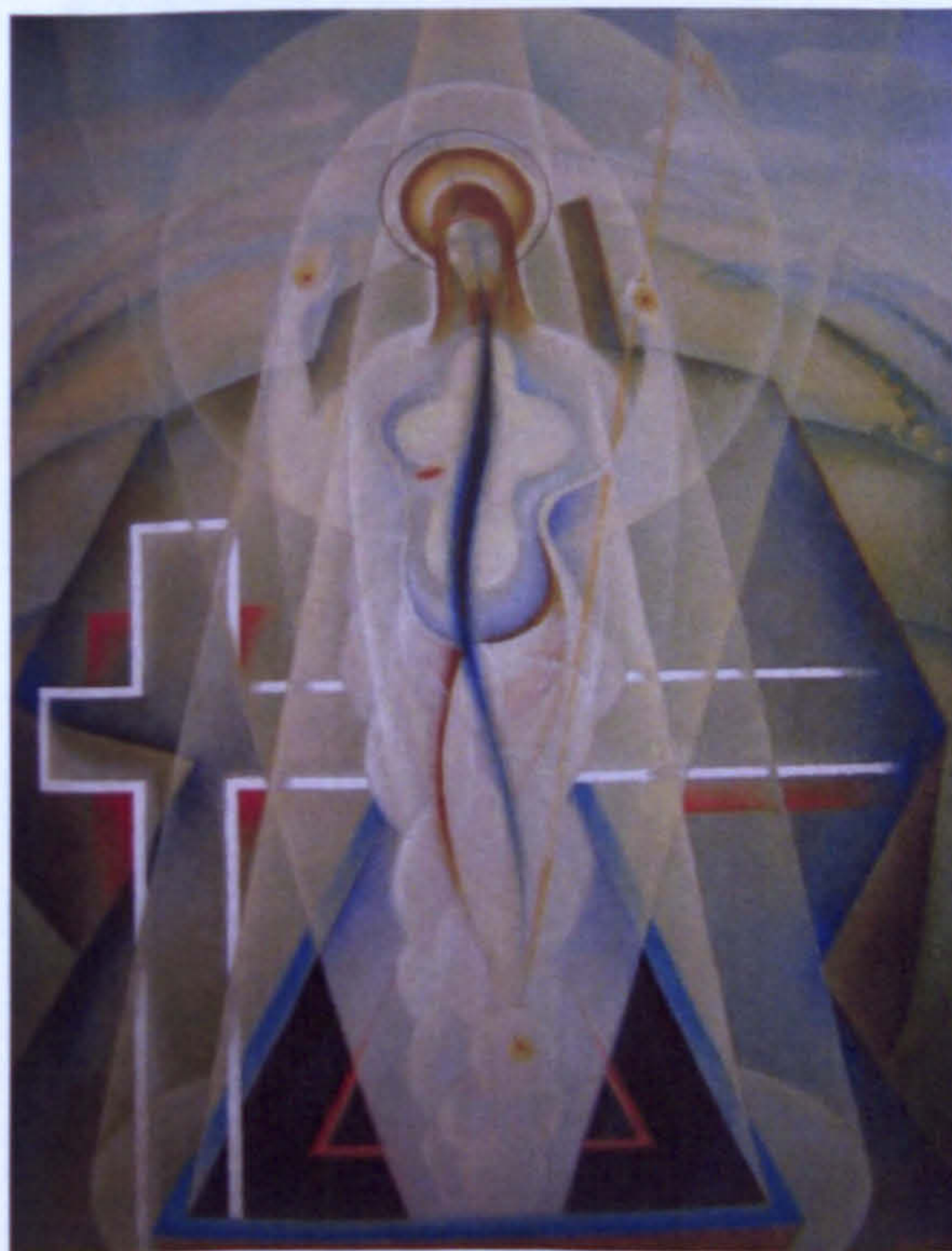


Figure 82 Alessandro Bruschetti, *Resurrezione* (Resurrection), 1933. Bruschetti Family Collection.

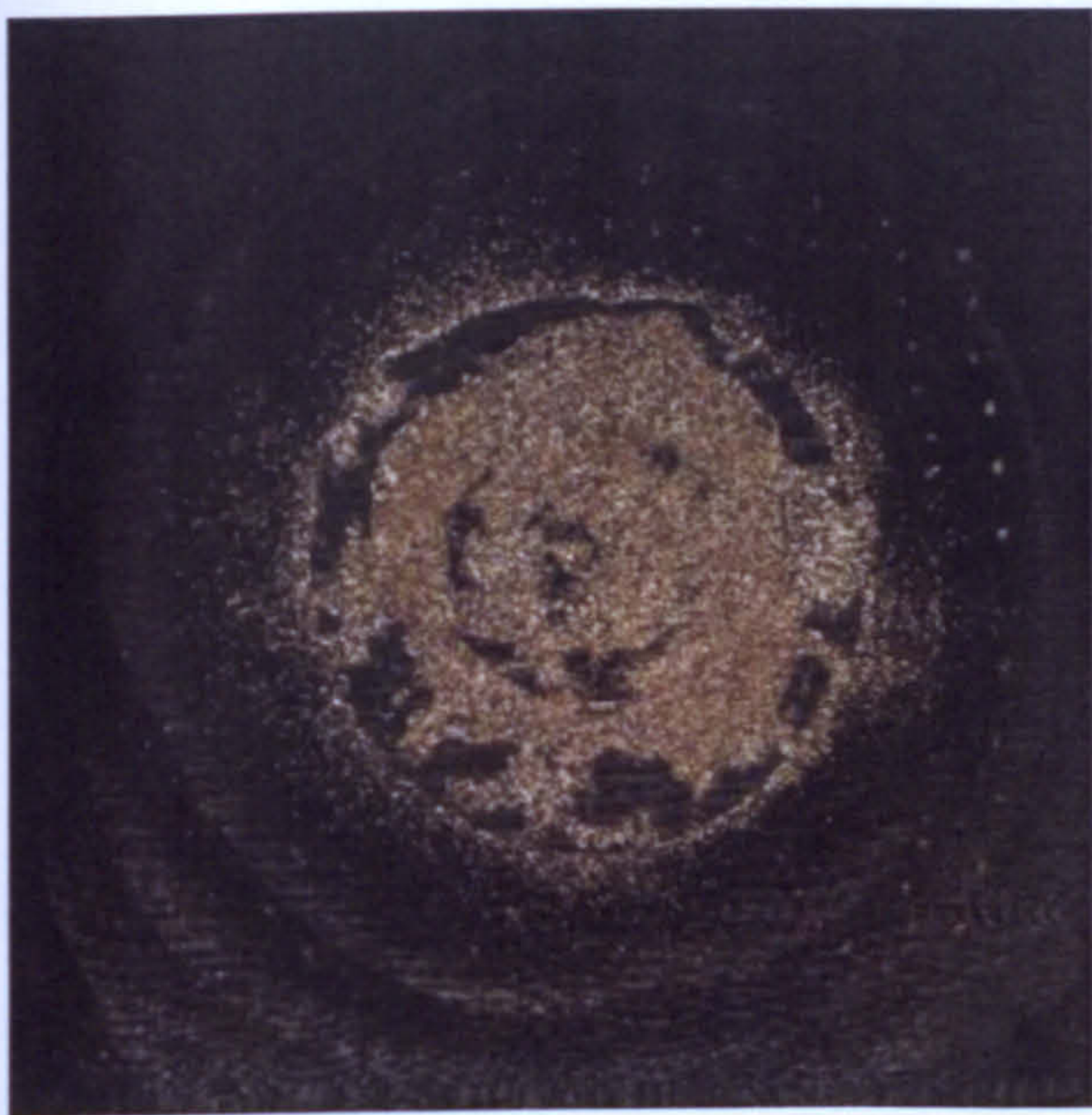


Figure 84 Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale* (Spatial Concept), 1951. Fondazione Lucio Fontana, Milan.



Figure 83 Lucio Fontana, *Natura* (Nature), 1959-60. Tate Modern, London.



Figure 85 Lucio Fontana, *Donna con fiore* (Woman with Flower), 1948. MART, Rovereto.

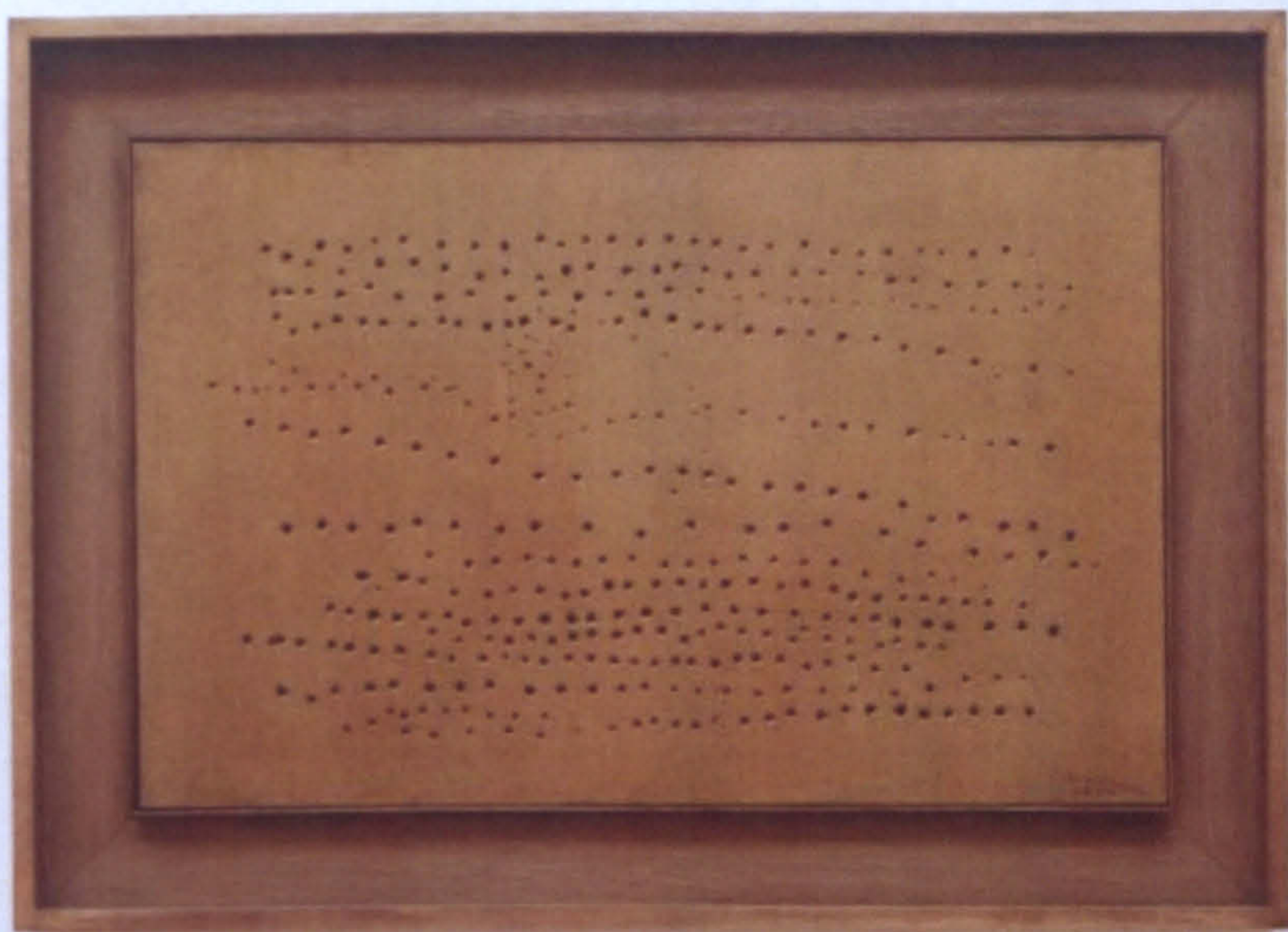


Figure 86 Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale* (Spatial Concept), 1949-50. Tate Modern, London.

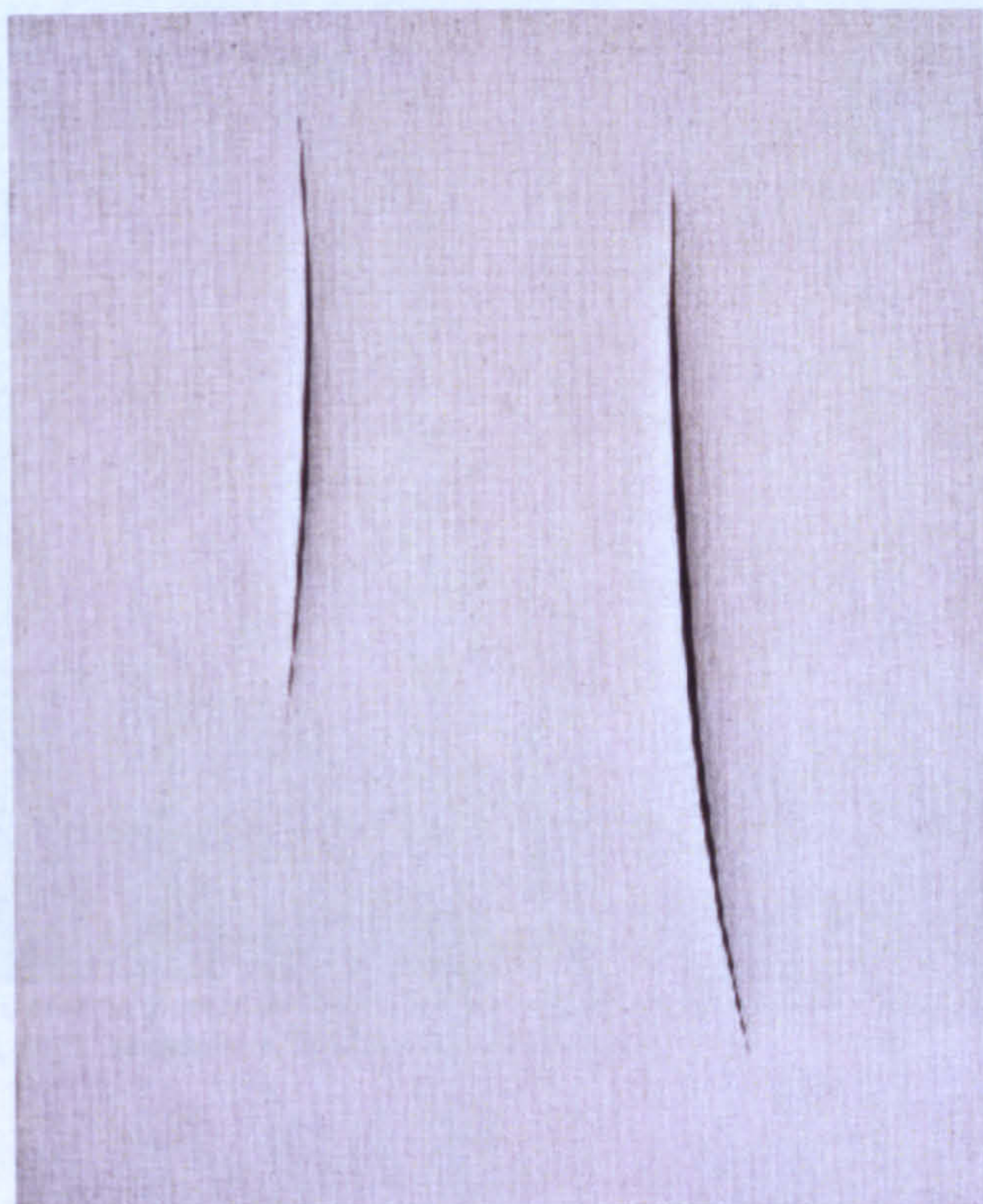


Figure 87 Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale* (Spatial Concept), 1959. MART, Rovereto.



Figure 88 Lucio Fontana, *Attese (Waiting)*, 1959. Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donna Regina, Naples.



Figure 89 Umberto Boccioni, *Stati d'animo. Quelli che restano (States of Mind. Those Who Stay)*, 1911. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

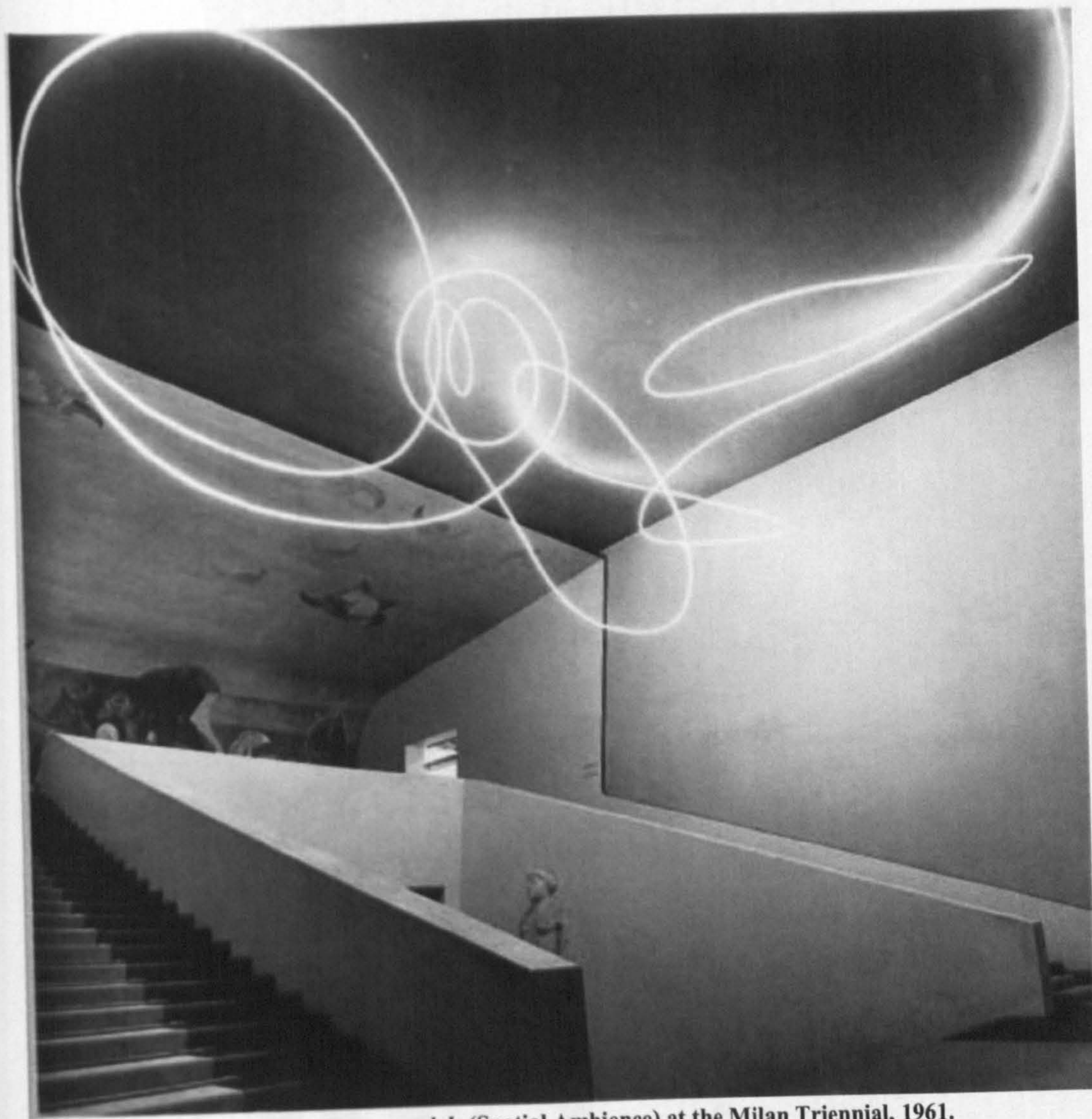


Figure 90 Lucio Fontana, *Ambiente spaziale* (Spatial Ambience) at the Milan Triennial, 1961.

Figure 91 Mario Botta, *Castello Sforzesco*, 1980, Milan.



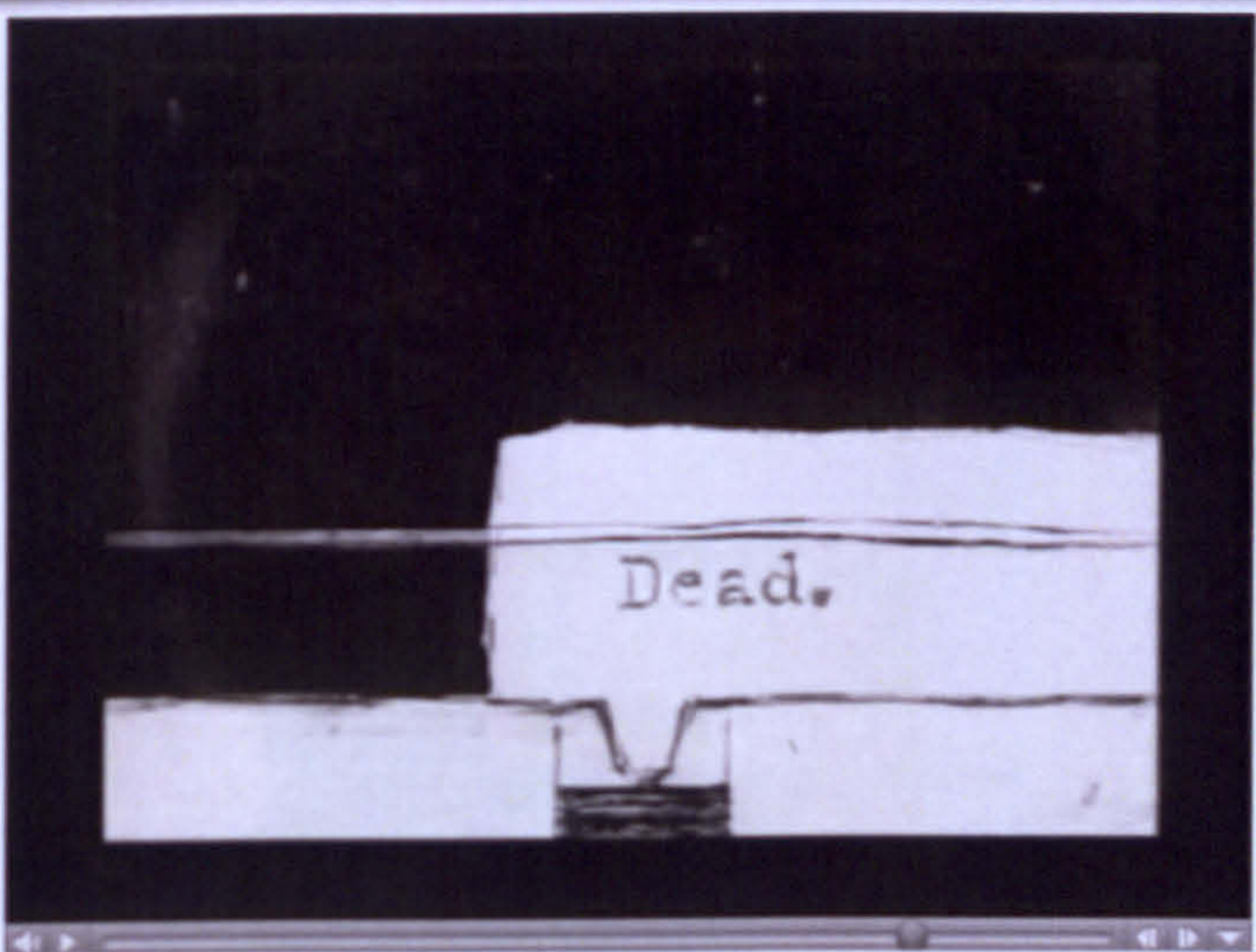
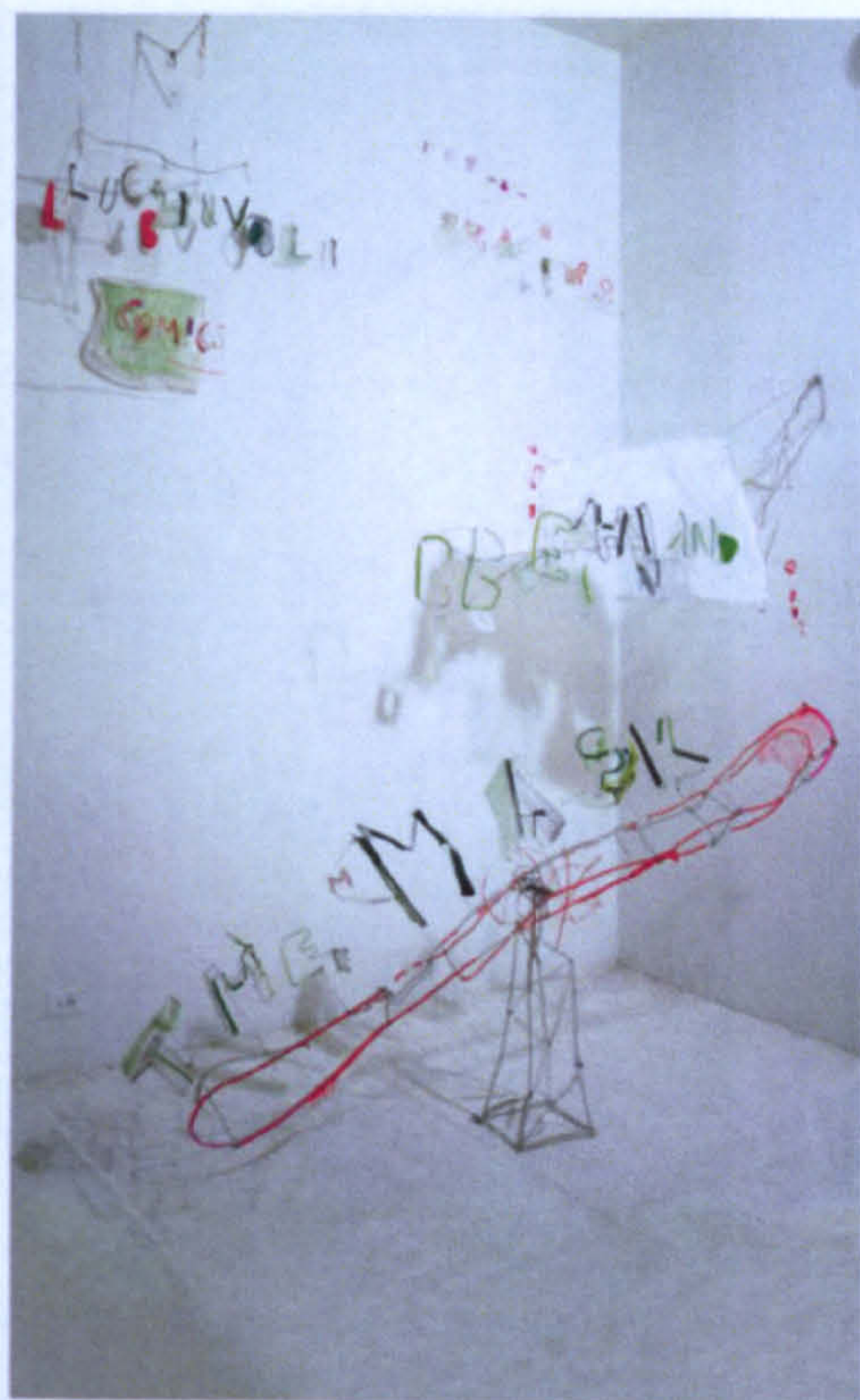
Figure 91 Alberto Burri, *Sacco nero bianco* (White and Black Sack), 1955. Private collection, Milan.



Figure 92 Mario Schifano, *Futurismo rivisitato* (Futurism Rvisited), 1966. Fondazione Marconi, Milan.



Synopsis of *The Non Adventures of Not-a-Superhero*, 2001, DVD, 3 minutes, color, music by Jeffrey Lepondorf © Luca Buvoli 2007



Movie Trailer for *Not-a-Superhero: Wherever You Are Not*, 1997, video, 2'42 min., music by Jeffrey Lepondorf © Luca Buvoli 2007



Figure 93 Luca Buvoli, *Not-a-Superhero* (Video and Installation), 1993-1997.

Figure 94 Renato di Bosso, *Pilota stratorsferico* (Stratospheric Pilot). 1938. Museo Caproni, Trento.



Figure 95 Domenico Belli, *Volo introspettivo* (Introspective Flight), 1934. Private collection, Rome.

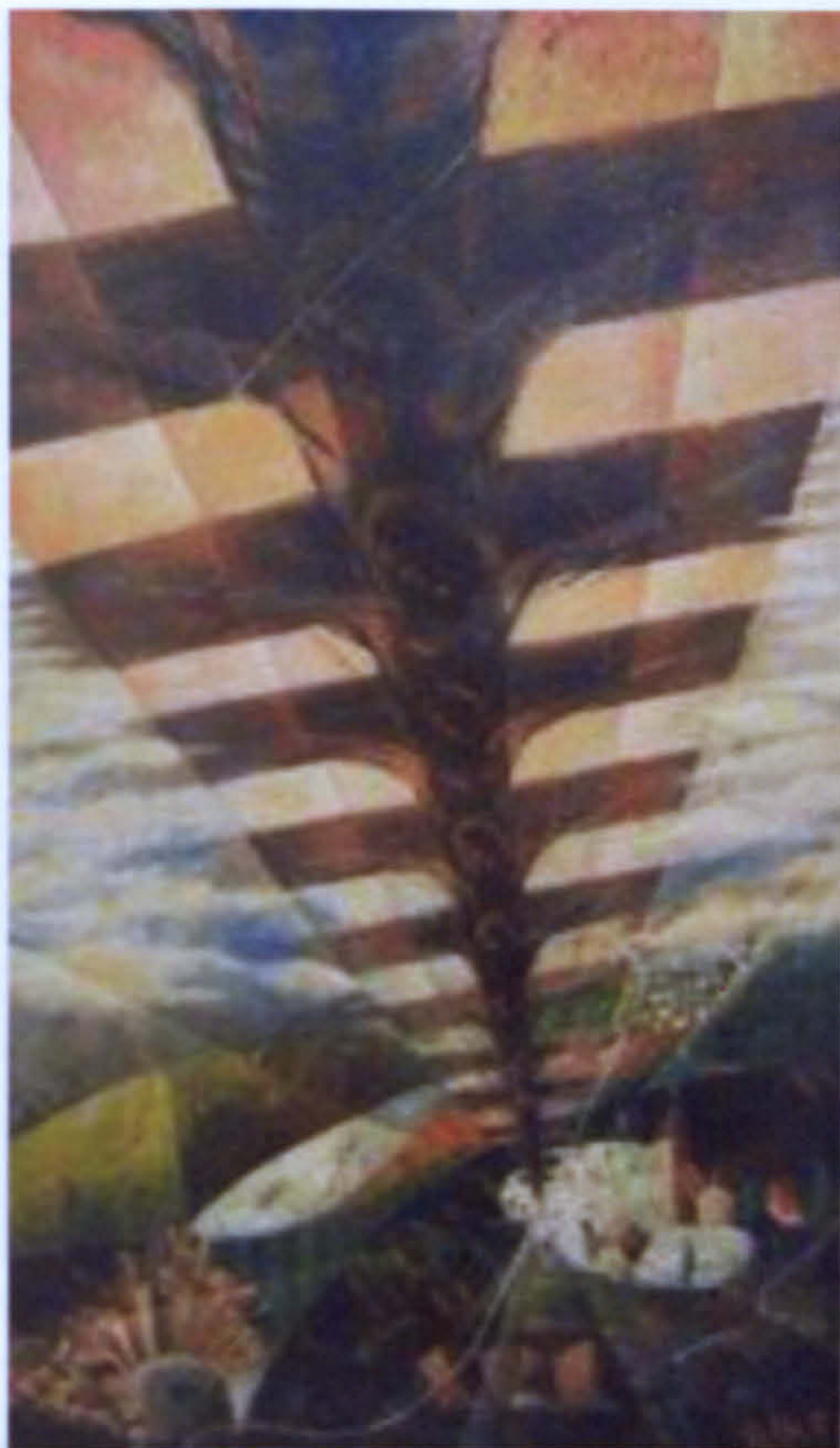


Figure 96 Nino Vitali, *Ascensione* (Ascension), 1930s. Private collection, Turin.



Figure 97 Professor M.a.S. from Luca Buvoli, *Flying Practical Training for Intermediate*, 2002.



Figure 98 Giovanni Acquaviva, *Aeroraccordi* (Aero-Links), 1938. Private collection.

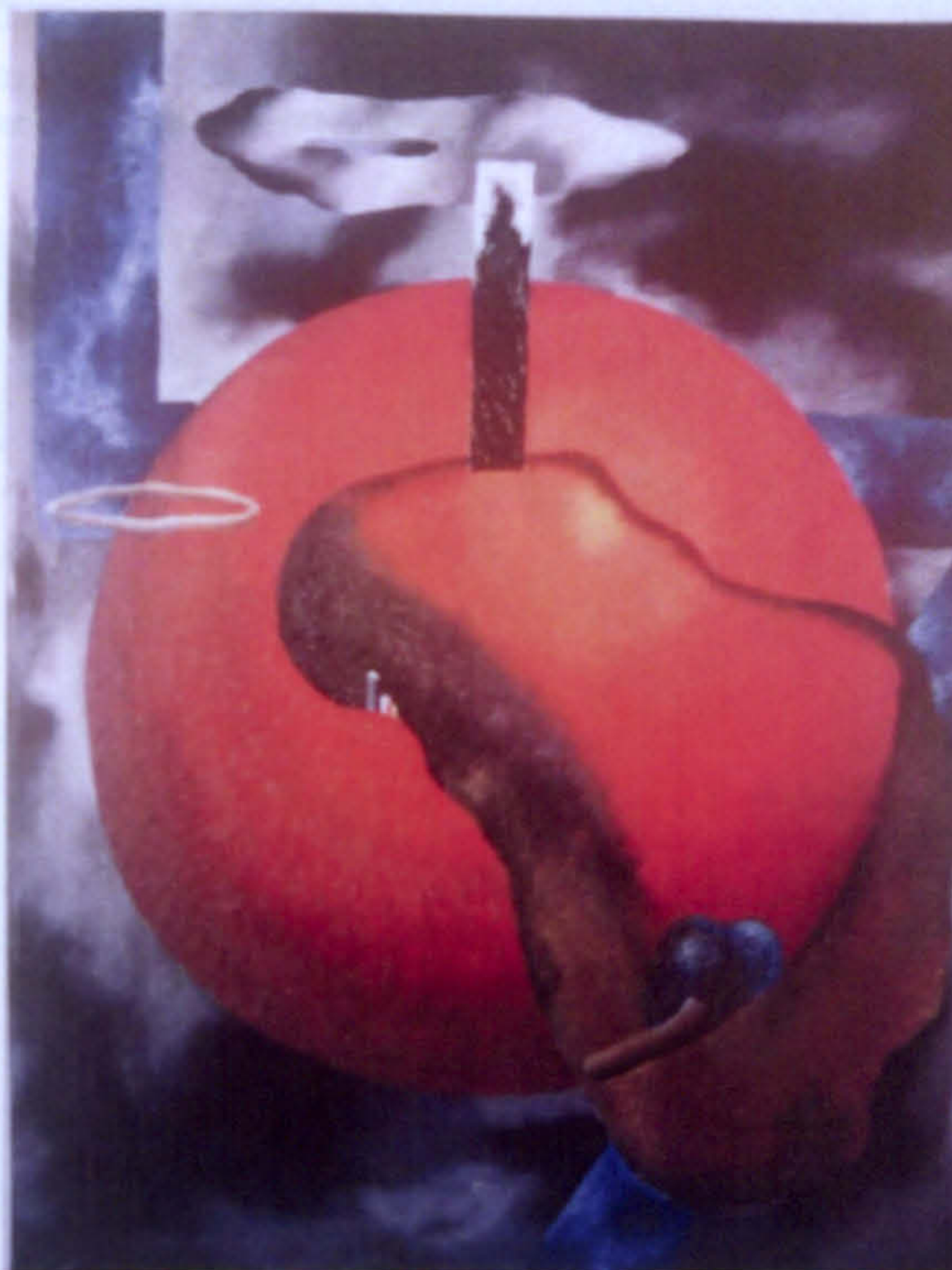


Figure 99 Fillia, *Superamento terrestre* (Terrestrial Overcoming), 1930-31. Collection Giardini.

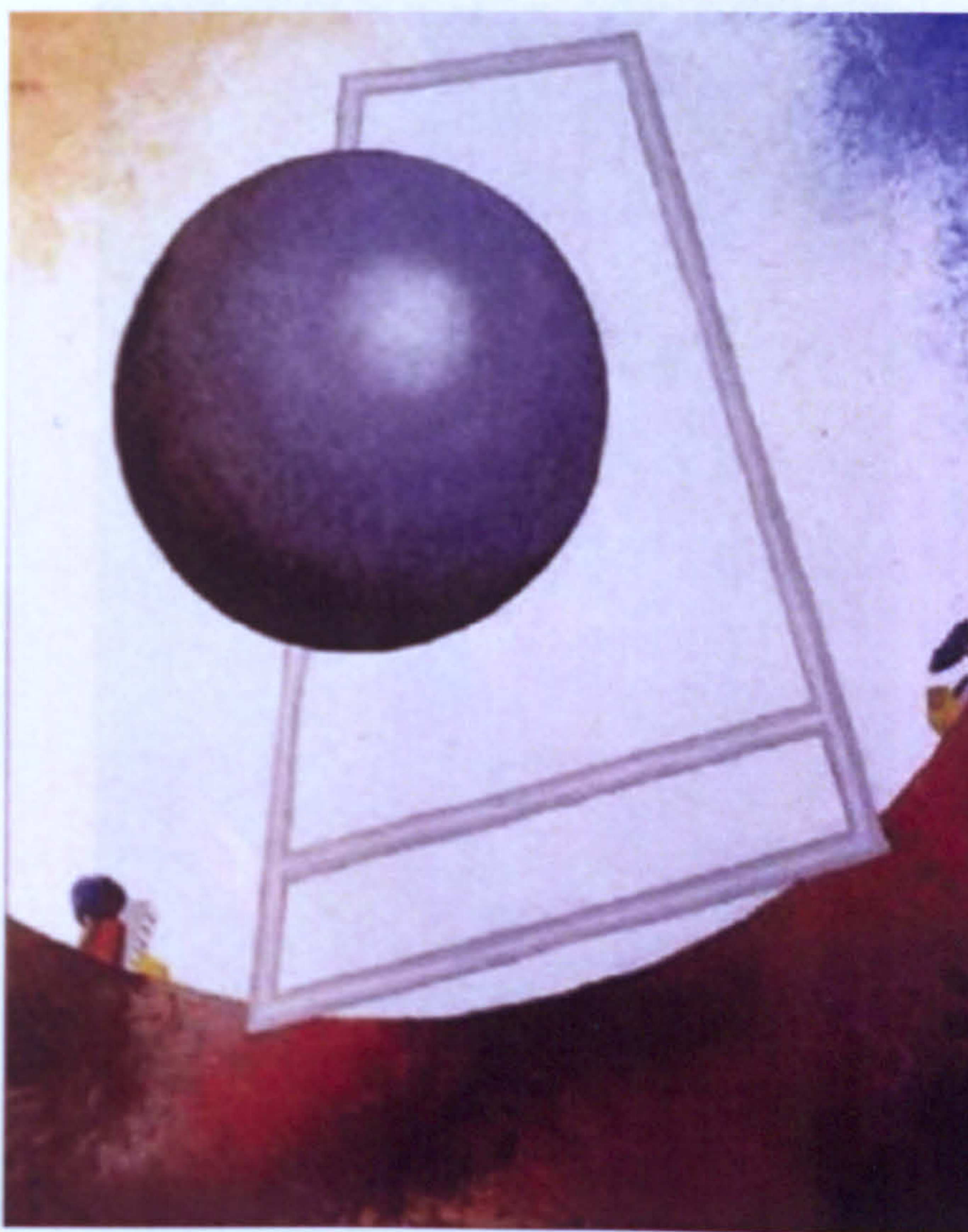


Figure 100 Fillia, *Senso di gravità* (Feel of Gravity), 1932. Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Genoa.



Figure 101 Luca Buvoli, *Anachroheroism*. Venice Biennale 2007.



Figure 102 Luca Buvoli, *Anachroheroism*. Venice Biennale 2007.



Figure 103 Luca Buvoli, *Instant Before Incident*. Susan Inglett Gallery, New York, 2008-09.



Figure 104 Luca Buvoli, *Work Done Before the Incident*. Susan Inglett Gallery, New York, 2008-09.

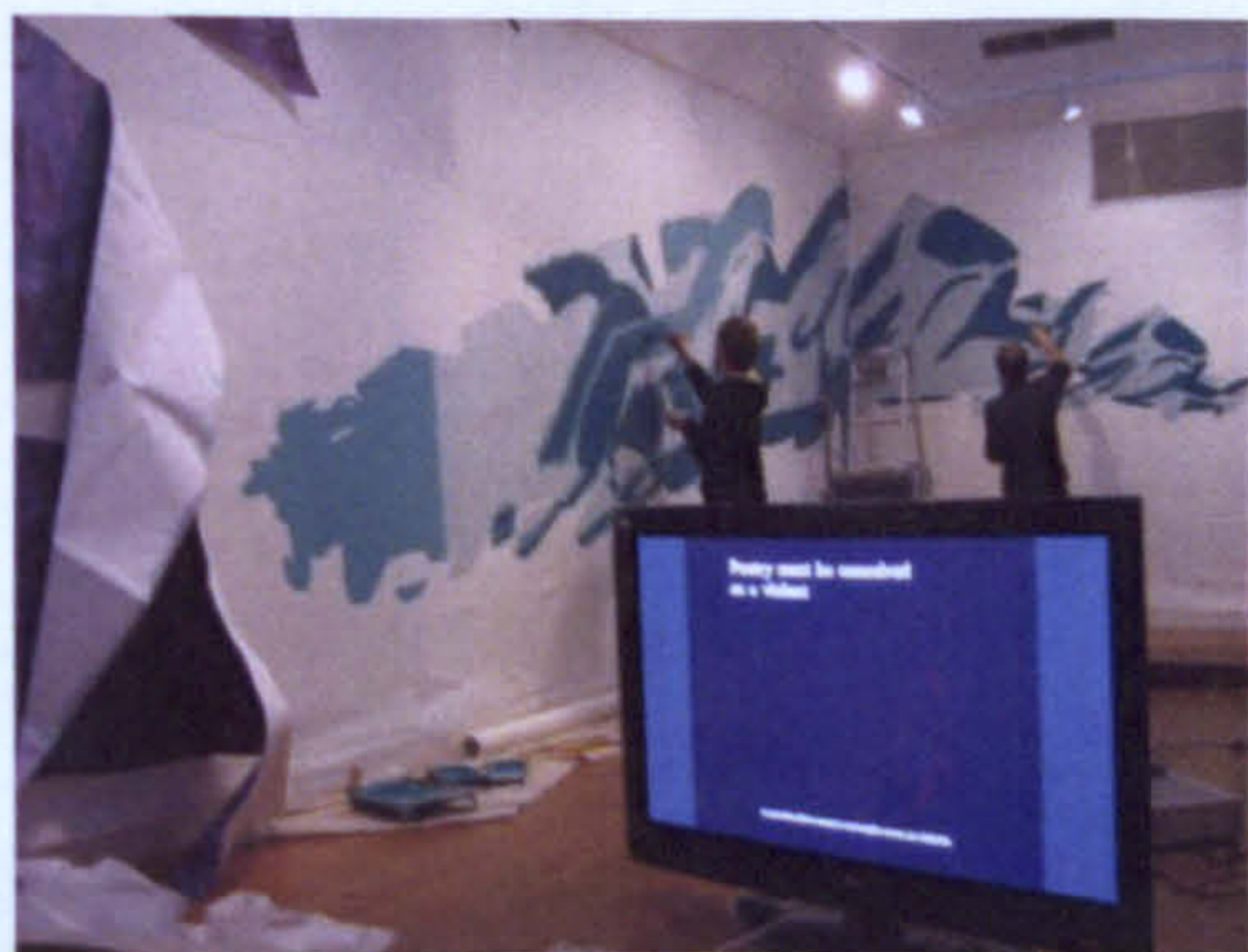


Figure 104 Luca Buvoli, *Velocità Zero* (Velocity Zero), 2009. Estorick Collection, London (exhibition *Futurismo 100*).



Figure 105 Luca Buvoli, *Entanglement of Modernist Myths*. Venice Biennale 2007.



Figure 106 Luca Buvoli, *Entanglement of Modernist Myths*. Venice Biennale 2007.

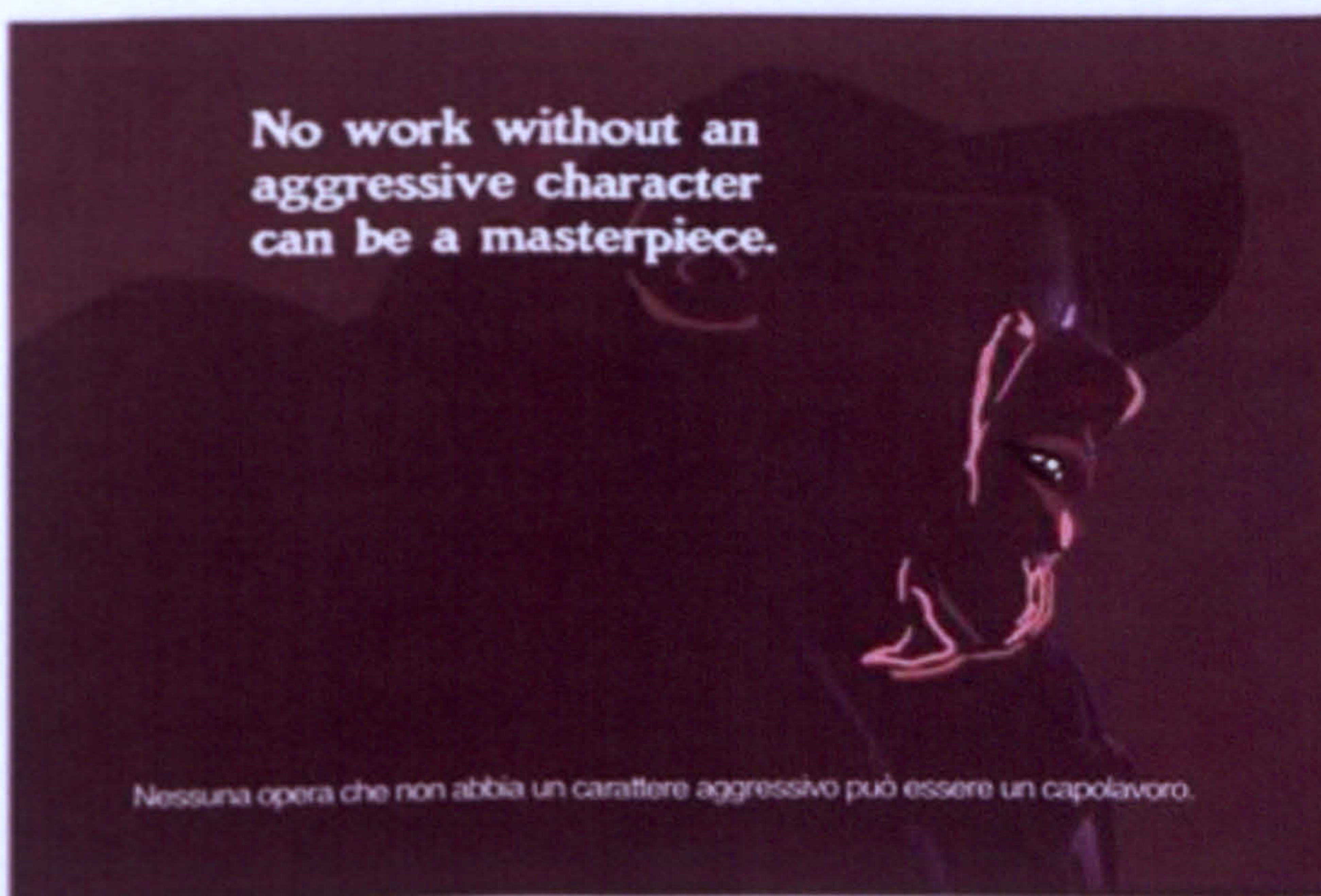


Figure 107 Luca Buvoli, *Velocity Zero* (Video), 2007.